

# **SYRIA STUDIES**

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***POST-UPRISING EXCAVATIONS***

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## Preface

OMAR IMADY

We are pleased to present VOL 11, NO 2, *Post-Uprising Excavations*. This issue of *Syria Studies* includes three articles: “UN Mediation in the Syrian Crisis: *From Kofi Annan Through Lakhdar Brahimi To Staffan De Mistura*” by I William Zartman; “Palestinians in the Syrian Uprising: *The Situation on the Ground*” by Ashraf Mousa; and “No Temple in Palmyra! *Opposing the Reconstruction of the Temple of Bel*” by Andreas Schmidt-Colinet.

Nine years after the Uprising began in Syria, historians and political analysts are embarking on what might be called ‘excavations,’ or a deeper introspection into the forces at work during these past nine years, and how the current status quo is reflective of the way in which these forces reinforced or cancelled out each other. In this issue of *Syria Studies*, examples of this intricate analytic process are provided by an array of distinguished, and emerging scholars.

In “*From Kofi Annan Through Lakhdar Brahimi To Staffan De Mistura*”, I William Zartman attempts to capture the critical facets of diplomacy that are at work in a mission as complex as the one Annan, Brahimi and De Mistura were involved in. Though he succeeds in identifying subtle areas within which the envoys could have employed a different approach, his central conclusion is that “Syria’s ability to obstruct the whole process and to refuse to accept any role for either Geneva or Astana in the establishment of a constitution was the insurmountable obstacle to any movement...”

In “Palestinians in the Syrian Uprising: *The Situation on the Ground*,” Ashraf Mousa explores an aspect of the Uprising which has not received adequate attention; namely, how segments of the population who were not directly part of the conflict interacted with, and were interacted with by both the regime and the opposition. Mousa attempts to “shed light on how and why Palestinian communities in Syria arrived at the political positions they ultimately did in relation to the conflict.” He finds that contrary to the assumption that the position of groups in a civil war is largely “based upon political alignments that preceded it,” it was, rather, “both contingent and arbitrary events” that were predominantly behind the actual positions that Palestinians ultimately adopted.

In “No Temple in Palmyra! *Opposing the Reconstruction of the Temple of Bel*”, Andreas Schmidt-Colinet argues that the debate over whether or not the Temple of Bel should be reconstructed should be “determined by the building *itself*, by its history, its historical background and context as well as by its cultural significance through scientific and scholarly research.” Andreas argues that within this debate the emphasis should, in fact, be on “the members of the local population who had worked for and with the foreigners and who were essential in the investigation and restoration of Palmyra as a World Heritage Site who require assistance.” After all, it is people of Palmyra who were primarily targeted by the terror of ISIL. Hence, focus should presently be on “the rebuilding of the city of Tadmur” rather than on the Temple or other ancient sites.

# 1

## UN MEDIATION IN THE SYRIAN CRISIS: *From Kofi Annan through Lakhdar Brahimi to Staffan de Mistura*

I WILLIAM ZARTMAN<sup>1</sup>

### Thinking About Mediation

UN mediation in Syria for the decade of the 2010s since the beginning of the Arab Spring in 2011 has failed because the conflict was not ripe. To arrive at that evaluation, one has to understand the basic challenges a mediator faces and the paths followed by the three UN mediators, Kofi Annan, Lakhdar Brahimi, and Staffan de Mistura.<sup>2</sup> Five basic challenges—agency, entry, strategy, leverage, inclusivity—confront a mediator on the pursuit of his/her efforts, and will be used as the framework for the following analysis. These challenges have been identified because they encompass the major parameters of the mediation process. They correspond to several headings emphasized in the *UN Guidance for Effective Mediation*<sup>3</sup> and highlight principal obstacles in the cardinal variables—actors (agency, inclusivity), structure (entry), process (leverage), strategy, and outcome—used in negotiation analysis.<sup>4</sup>

Agency. The mandate of the mission is set by the authorizing agency.<sup>5</sup> The spectrum runs between full freedom to mediate and full backing from appropriate authorities, to a very restrictive mandate that requires the mediator to return home to cultivate support at each juncture. At the same time, the mandate is a two-way street; it commits the granting agency to support the designated mediator by endorsing and implementing his results, both collectively and as individual members. The mediator is an intermediary both between conflicting parties and also between the parties and the mandating source, but the latter has a responsibility to support his work.

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Inclusivity. The parties in the conflict on all three levels--parties, patrons and powers--should be parties to the negotiation of a solution.<sup>6</sup> If they persist as spoilers and refuse to be part of the solution, they can be excluded only if they are not strong enough to upset the agreement among others.

Strategy. With the goal defined, the mediator has to consider how it is to be achieved, and most notably the relation between the procedural requirement of ending violence (conflict management--CM) and the need for a substantive formula for handling the conflict issues (conflict resolution--CR). Specifically, does the mediator manage the conflict with a ceasefire and disengagement first and then perhaps turn to seek a settlement, or does the mediator work on a resolving agreement which would give a reason for ceasing violence and then, or in the process, install a ceasefire.

Each has its logic: Putting ceasefire and disengagement before resolution argues that the parties need to have fully abstained from violence before they can talk peace. Examples are Northern Ireland, the Liberian civil war, Bosnia, Sri Lanka, and Darfur. The problem is that early ceasefires rarely hold without some parallel movement toward resolution and are an if-and-on process, so that a requirement of total abstinence may prevent peace talks.<sup>7</sup> Ceasefires between Israel and Hamas in 2008, 2012, and 2014, mediated by Egypt, were their own end; some, including Hamas, have regretted the fact that they did not proceed on toward elements of CR. Ceasefires in Western Sahara, Nagorno-Karabakh and Cyprus have been more or less successful but have not led to CR.

On the other hand, agreement on an outcome or procedure to resolution can be required before violence is ended, so that a ceasefire does not come fully into effect until the peace agreement is signed or close to it, and parties know for what outcome they are giving up violence. Examples are the 2013-2015 Colombian talks with the FARC, or the 1989-1992 Salvadoran talks with the FNLM, or the 1990-1994 Mozambican talks with

RENAMO, or the 1980-1988 South Africa, Cuban and Angolan talks over South West Africa (Namibia). The advantage is that the parties see what they are ceasing violence for; the danger is that the violence may simply overwhelm the peace process.

Entry. The mediator is a meddler, not necessarily welcome, and must find a way to be accepted by the parties. They may be looking for a mediator to help them out of the conflict, but, if not, the mediator will have to convince them of the need for mediation.<sup>8</sup> In the first case of a ripe conflict, both parties would be convinced of the impossibility of a one-sided victory and would be looking to emerge from a painful situation under the best terms. Both the US and Iran were willing to look for a solution to the hostage-and-sanctions situation in 1979 and welcomed Algeria to serve as a mediator to work out an agreement. In such cases there is no victory to be had, both sides are in a costly stalemate and feel it, and they looked for a way out.

On the other hand, when the conflicting parties do not realize their impasse and the burden that continued conflict imposes, the mediator must first ripen their perception of the situation, either by developing an awareness of the costly impasse or by presenting an alternative so attractive in comparison with the present impasse that it catches their attention.<sup>9</sup> But the mediator can push only so far, lest he lose the entry completely. It took the efforts of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) behind those of UN SESG Jamal Benomar, backed by threats from the UNSC, to convince the two sides in Yemen of their need for mediation and to bring them to an agreement on Ali Saleh's departure from the presidency (in exchange for amnesty) in 2012. But if the hurting stalemate is not perceived and felt by the parties to push them to accept mediation, no amount of enticing plans for the future can pull them to negotiate.

Leverage. Although leverage in the common understanding refers to hard power or "muscle", in reality the mediator has little of this type. He depends on the wisdom and appeal of his

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arguments. In the context of negotiation as “giving something to get something,” the mediator is a *demandeur* and thus in a weak position. He rarely has the means to threaten or promise anything substantive and can only warn and predict consequences beyond his control or borrow leverage (power) from the context. Conflicts tend to come in stacked layers or circles (in Lakhdar Brahimi’s language): first among the parties themselves, second among their regional patrons, and third among the powers of the members of the UNSC. All three levels—parties, patrons and powers—offer terrain on which the mediator can operate in search of leverage over other levels and a source from which to borrow power.

These five challenges frame the practice of mediation as used by the three successive mediators.

##### **The Unfavorable Mediation Context**

The conflict in Syria is particularly resistant to mediation.<sup>10</sup> The Syrian regime, made up of hardened Machiavellians, has been prepared to do whatever necessary to survive, whatever the cost to the country; constituted along neo-patrimonial lines, it would find it very hard to share power or to remove the president without risk of collapse. Assad warned: “No political dialogue or political activity can succeed while there are armed terrorist groups operating and spreading chaos and instability.”<sup>11</sup> The opposition contributed to the intractability of the conflict through its maximalist demands for the “fall of the regime”<sup>12</sup> and its unwillingness, whether in the name of a democratic or Islamist state, to accept a political compromise. The opposition also lacked credible leaders who could deliver its consent to any negotiated settlement, being divided between a fractious exiled opposition with little legitimacy inside the country and those inside Syria who were increasingly fragmented into multiple localized factions and dominated by intransigent and often warring jihadist factions.

A mediation’s first window of opportunity comes before violence becomes too deep and closes as it intensifies mutual

hostility; however this opportunity depends on ripeness in prospect, where the parties realize that a precipice is looming ahead.<sup>13</sup> In the Syrian case, the first opportunity was when the Arab League made its efforts in 2011.<sup>14</sup> It failed because of the inexperience of the mediator, a Sudanese general, and the bias of the mediating agency, and because of the ineptitude of the ceasefire monitors.

The last obvious opportunity while violence was still somewhat contained was in April-May 2012 during Kofi Annan's mediation. This had failed by July 2012 and violence was sharply ratcheted up as the opposition was militarized, with casualties doubling from 2200 in June to 5000 in August 2012. A de facto partition soon emerged, with the front lines fairly stabilized and the turf won by rival warlords compensated for the damage inflicted by the conflict. This was the situation encountered by Brahimi's mediation mission throughout 2013. Statistical research<sup>15</sup> suggests a hurting stalemate is most often reached 130 months and 33,000 battle deaths into a conflict; in Syria battle deaths by far exceeded this in less than half the time (220,000 by January 2015 according to UN figures).

A new window of opportunity for a political settlement could open only when both sides simultaneously would recognize the impossibility of military victory. Objectively, such a "hurting stalemate" appeared to have been reached by at least the third year of the conflict as it became apparent that neither side could defeat the other, particularly after the battle lines between regime and opposition-controlled parts of the country became hardened. Decisive in explaining this was the way external intervention fueled the conflict. Each side believed that, if only its external patrons provided it with more resources or increased their intervention on its behalf, the balance of power would shift, allowing it victory. External players continued to provide their clients with enough support to keep fighting and avoid defeat but not enough to defeat their opponent.<sup>16</sup>

The opposition had declared that Asad's departure was non-negotiable but, lacking the means to force it, was counting

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on Western intervention and would accept UN mediation only if it produced regime change. The Western powers showed no appetite for military intervention but saw UN diplomacy as a way to remove Asad, whom they had de-recognized in favor of the exiled Syrian National Council (SNC) as a legitimate representative of the Syrian people.<sup>17</sup>

On the other side, Asad's great power backers were not prepared to abandon him. On 12 May, 10 June, 11 October 2011 and 4 Feb 2012, Russia (and China) had blocked Western drafts condemning the Syrian government's repression of protestors on the grounds that it did not also condemn outside arming and violence by the opposition. The Russians saw a Libyan scenario unfolding in favor of the US and wanted above all to avoid it. Annan's appointment was a compromise to get beyond this stalemate, but the powers agreed to it for opposite reasons: Russia to allow the Syrian regime to survive and the West to remove it.<sup>18 19</sup>

### **Kofi Annan's Mediation Mission**

Kofi Annan took up his mandate in February 2012 amid many indications the conflict was not ripe for a negotiated settlement. In Annan's view, the mission was worth the attempt since the alternatives were so bleak: the spillover effects of the crisis threatened to de-stabilize the whole region.<sup>20</sup> Annan proposed a 6-point conflict management plan on 16 March 2012 under which the Syrian government should immediately cease troop movements and the use of heavy weapons, and begin a pullback of military concentrations in population centers, permit access and timely provision of humanitarian assistance, release prisoners, and respect freedom of expression and assembly. Annan delivered the plan to Asad but the Syrian government asked for clarifications and seemingly wanted to negotiate the plan, despite minor adjustments already made in response to Syrian concerns. Annan aimed to present the regime with two bad choices—accepting or rejecting—in the expectation it would choose the least bad; while it may not have liked the 6 points, it

would not feel it could publicly reject them. Annan submitted the plan to the UNSC, which endorsed it on March 21. He then successfully enlisted Russia to pressure Asad into acceptance of the plan on March 27. He announced the Syrian government's acceptance before it had done so to maneuver it into committing to a fait accompli.

### **Ceasefire: Pincer Move**

Next, Annan extended the plan to a ceasefire. Again, the Syrian government demurred on the grounds that the opposition was being armed from without; but again Russia successfully pressured Asad to accept. The ceasefire required the government make the first withdrawals by 10 April, while the Free Syrian Army (FSA) would follow two days later. The regime agreed to start withdrawing its heavy weapons but qualified this by asserting that the security forces would not withdraw from cities until "normal life" had been restored. It also asserted that "a crystal clear commitment" from the US, France, Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia to stop aiding rebel fighters was "an integral part of the understanding" with Annan.<sup>21</sup> UNSC 2042 was passed unanimously on 21 April, providing for a UN Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS) to deploy 300 unarmed soldiers to observe compliance with the ceasefire.

In Annan's thinking, the ceasefire would change the psychology of escalation that was driving the conflict and open the door to political negotiations.<sup>22</sup> He aimed to catch the regime in a pincer movement combining international and, especially, Russian pressure from above and renewed mass protest from below. A watershed was the contested massacre at Houla on 26 May for which UNSMIS blamed pro-Asad forces. The Security Council was unable to agree on a response due to Russia's refusal to blame the Syrian government. In May, believing that its flank was protected by Russia and that the international consensus against its use of violence had been broken, the regime returned to use of heavy weapons.

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### **Action Group: Creating a Transitional Government**

In response, with the aim of increasing the pressure on the regime, Annan convened the Action Group on Syria, centered on UNSC members and excluding the Syrian government and its patron, Iran (vetoed by the US). The Group issued the Geneva Communiqué on 30 June 2012, calling for inclusive national dialogue on a political transition with all parties represented; the shape of a future Syrian state was sketched, including constitutional reform and a multi-party system. To reassure the government, it supported the continuity of government institutions, including the military and security forces, albeit submitted to a transitional government. The reference to political transition and transitional justice, including accountability for crimes, was bound to be seen as threatening by the regime. At Russia's insistence, the communiqué did not explicitly call for Asad to go, either before or during negotiation, as the opposition had insisted.

The Geneva Communiqué was not implemented—indeed it was not even adopted by the UNSC for another two years—and as violence continued to increase, the observer mission ceased its activities on 16 June. On 19 July 2012, Russia and China vetoed a strong resolution that would have applied non-military sanctions to the regime under Chapter 7 if it did not end the use of heavy weapons, withdraw troops from towns and cities, and implement Annan's peace plan. This was the last straw for Annan and he resigned as mediator on 2 August 2012.

### **What went wrong?**

Annan blamed the Syrian government's refusal to implement the 6-point plan; the escalating military campaign of the Syrian opposition; and the lack of unity in the UNSC. But leverage to get the regime to buy into the plan was lacking, as were incentives to divide the regime. He also had no strategy for addressing opposition intransigence and no pressure on regional powers to stop opposition financing. Annan had no leverage to bring the neighbors into his plan, only persuasion, which had no weight.

As a result, he put much effort on the “outer ring” or third level of players, the US and Russia, and was relying on Russian pressure on the regime to deliver its acquiescence.<sup>23</sup> While Asad would acquiesce in Russian pressure to engage with the mediator, he was impervious to influence insofar as the plan put his vital interests at risk. Asad and Putin hid behind each other.

Annan understood that the Russians were determined to prevent a repeat of the West’s manipulation of the UNSC humanitarian resolution over Libya for purposes of military intervention and regime change; hence he tried to reassure them that his plan was a genuine diplomatic alternative. “One of my biggest disappointments”, Annan recalled, “was on the 30th of June. We had a difficult but a constructive meeting in Geneva, to discuss a political transition. They agreed on a communiqué, but on the 19th of July, when the council eventually acted, the resolution was vetoed by Russia and China.”<sup>24</sup> This was a result of the US insistence that the resolution had to be given teeth under chapter VII. Annan believed chapter VI would suffice and Moscow, would have accepted it.<sup>25</sup> UNSC unity foundered on the opposite expectations held by the West and Russia for the outcome of mediation; change of the Syrian regime for the West, its preservation (albeit reformed) for Russia.

The Geneva communiqué, based on Annan’s 6-point plan, remained the ideal internationally accepted template for a political settlement in Syria that could still be activated if the parties were to come, as a result of shifts in the power balance, to believe a negotiated settlement is in their interests.<sup>26</sup> However, it reflected a stage when it was still thought possible to roll back the damage done by the conflict and constitute a pluralist settlement within a working state.

### **Lakhdar Brahimi's Mediation Mission**

Lakhdar Brahimi took the reins as U.N.-Arab League Envoy to Syria on 17 August 2012 after a long career of mediator in Lebanon, Afghanistan and elsewhere for the UN and for Algeria. He felt from the start that the mission was impossible but took it on

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“because the UN cannot resign from its role [just] because crises are difficult.”<sup>27</sup> Indeed, the conflict had become much more intractable from Annan’s time, as militarization, sectarianization and state failure proceeded apace.

### **Inner Circle Strategy: Reaching out to the parties**

Brahimi began his mission by making contact with the conflicting parties, including Assad, and with the regional patrons, including Iranian president Ahmedinejad. His repeated message, meant to ripen perceptions of a hurting stalemate (that arguably existed objectively), was that “there is no military solution to this devastating conflict. Only a political solution will put an end to it. And the basis for such a solution does exist. It is the [Geneva] Communiqué.”<sup>28</sup> The first meeting with Assad was cordial with wishes of success for the mediation mission. But when Brahimi raised the question of his resignation in the second meeting, Assad reverted to his claim of elected legitimacy and the inconceivability of stepping aside, and called Brahimi biased.

Brahimi tried small concrete conflict management measures to foster trust and start reducing violence, with a four-day ceasefire on October 24 marking ‘Id al-Adha with UNSC endorsement. The ceasefire was only a framework, with a number of voluntary provisions, and rapidly collapsed. In the beginning of 2013, in January and February, Brahimi brought government and opposition leaders to Geneva for two rounds of peace talks and produced a ceasefire in Homs, again for humanitarian purposes, but it lasted only a week.

Since early in his tenure, Brahimi struggled to find a legitimate negotiating partner within the diversified opposition, split between the U.S.-supported moderate opposition based in Istanbul and a slew of more Islamist armed rebel groups plus some regime-recognized opposition groups inside Syria. Shortly after the foreign ministers’ meeting, on 12 December 2012, the US formally recognized the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (COS) that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Qatar had cobbled together as the “legitimate

representative” of the Syrian people. As Brahimi saw it, fragmented into hundreds of groups supported by rival external powers, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, the opposition never became a truly national movement, such as the FLN or the Vitcong, which could negotiate and deliver on any agreements reached. According to Brahimi, the Americans' hands in the third circle were “tied in knots by their allies” in the second circle.<sup>29</sup> When the Arab League voted to give Syria's chair to the opposition on 6 March 2013, Brahimi felt that the door on the second level was closed and with it the chances of mediation, and he resigned. Pressed by all sides, he agreed to stay on because of the upcoming meeting in Moscow.

### **Outer Circle Strategy: Betting on the Big Powers**

Faced with the conclusion that no movement was possible on the first or second circles, Brahimi sought movement, as had Annan, through the third circle—Russia and the US.<sup>30</sup> “We tried the outer ring, which is the Security Council, and for me that was specifically the Americans and the Russians.” He urged a meeting of great power foreign ministers to develop the Geneva Communiqué into a full transition plan. He laid more detailed proposals before Secretary Hilary Clinton and Minister Sergey Lavrov in Dublin on 7 December 2012, specifying some of the steps and timings left imprecise in the Communiqué. It included provision for a transition government “with full executive power” with no progress on the specific consequences for Assad. He followed up the foreign ministers' meeting with the “3Bs” meetings of Brahimi, US Under Secretary of State William Burns, and Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Nicholas Bogdanov to try to reach a consensus on which to base a move toward a peace conference. Although the meetings proceeded cordially, they repeatedly deadlocked on the same issue, the status of Assad, and the Russians rejected a US proposal to discuss the composition of a transitional government as an outside attempt to impose a leadership on Syria. From Brahimi's perspective, both “the Americans and the Russians discovered

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that their agreement was superficial” shortly after they had agreed to it.<sup>31</sup> In guaranteeing mention of a transitional government, the US thought it had won support for the notion that Asad would not participate in any transition, whereas the Russians believed the “transitional phase should begin with the regime and opposition sitting down together.”<sup>32</sup>

Like Annan, Brahimi banked particularly on Russian cooperation, since the Russians on occasion intimated flexibility. Noting that “Western countries have not realized yet how angry the Russians felt about what happened in Libya,”<sup>33</sup> Brahimi hoped that proper recognition of the Russian role could convince it to work on getting cooperation from the Syrian government. In fact, the Russians maintained that they were not inextricably committed to Asad, and that if the opposition “got its act together” and a viable substitute emerged, as long as none of the Islamist groups would take power, Russia would support an interim transition body instead of an immediately negotiated outcome. But, at the same time, the Russians consistently said it was not up to them to ask President Asad to leave office: “We do not have that much influence over him, even if we wanted.”<sup>34</sup> They seemed to want the transition council also to contain opposition figures from Damascus, whom the US and the opposition derided as Asad puppets.

Two events provided some impetus to kick-start Brahimi’s faltering mediation mission. First, on 7 May 2013 the US and Russia appeared to reach a breakthrough agreement during Secretary of State John Kerry’s first official visit to Moscow. “Something extremely important took place,”<sup>35</sup> in Brahimi’s assessment: of a declaration of shared interests on Syria and a plan for an international peace conference to end the escalating civil war, planned for the end of May 2013. For the US, which had been lukewarm on the idea of a peace conference, this was a major shift.

It took a second event, the chemical weapons attacks on the Damascus suburbs of East Ghouta, to jolt the global level parties into intervening in the stalemate. UNSC resolution 2118

of 22 September 2013 finally included a formal UN endorsement of Annan's Geneva Communiqué and called for "the convening, as soon as possible, of an international conference on Syria to implement" the Communiqué.<sup>36 37</sup> Just getting the government and opposition to the table on 15 January 2014 was an accomplishment of sorts and might potentially have allowed an exploration of common ground between the two. Brahimi was keen that Iran, the most influential force behind Assad, be also involved and enlisted the UN Secretary-General's help. Ban issued an invitation to Iran just days before the Conference was set to begin, on 19 January, whereupon the opposition National Coalition threatened to back out. Ban withdrew the invitation under US pressure; the US view was that since Iran had not endorsed the terms of Geneva Communiqué, it could not attend as a full participant.

### **Geneva II: Bringing together the regime and opposition**

Though the Geneva II Conference to be held on 22-31 January and 10-15 February 2014 marked the first time the Syrian government sat down with an opposition body, it failed to deliver a breakthrough. Yet, on the Conference's second day, 26 January, Brahimi announced one step forward, as the government agreed to allow some 6,000 women and children leave the opposition-held central neighborhoods of Homs, Syria's third-largest city, to which the pro-government forces' siege had denied humanitarian access for more than a year.<sup>38</sup>

"I think rather the progress we have made is that whereas the opposition and their supporters were saying that there is nothing to talk about until Bashar leaves, they are saying now that we can talk while Bashar is there," Brahimi said.<sup>39</sup> The government, however, accused the opposition of terrorism and never departed from its refrain that the first requirement was to deal with the terrorism problem. Brahimi remarked to the government delegation: "I'm sure that your instructions were: 'Go to Geneva, only don't make any concessions, don't discuss anything seriously.'" <sup>40</sup>

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Thus, the remaining days of the Conference bore little fruit.<sup>41</sup> A second round of talks, reconvening in February, quickly collapsed after thirty minutes.<sup>42</sup> “I am very very sorry and I apologize to the Syrian people,” Brahimi told reporters at the conclusion of the talks, which were largely overshadowed by yet another round of deep violence and displacement, as 50,000 Syrians fled the Syrian air force bombardment of the Qalamoun area.<sup>43</sup> Less than two months later, following the government’s announcement that it would hold Presidential elections in June 2014, effectively terminating Brahimi’s attempts to revive the Geneva process, he tendered his resignation.

### **What Went Wrong?**

In his twenty-one months as U.N.-Arab League Envoy, Brahimi made admittedly little headway, as the conflict continued to spiral. Caught between rival spoilers: Brahimi’s mediation appropriately reflected a new realization that the Syrian regime was not easily or soon going to go.

Geneva II failed, Brahimi concluded, because the conflict was not ripe for resolution, and he had no leverage to make it so, although it did provide an occasion for him to repeat his message: devastating conflict, no military solution, political solution indicated by the Geneva Communiqué. In keeping with his view that the key to a resolution had to be a US-Russian convergence to push their regional and Syrian clients into a compromise settlement, Brahimi pursued the top-down strategy, as had Annan. However, “neither Russia nor the US could convince their friends to participate in the negotiations with serious intent.”<sup>44</sup> This conflicting assessment of the situation prevented their reaching agreement on the details of a transition: the US wanted too much, the Russian conceded too little and the mediator was caught between the two.

Ostensibly, the second circle of states offers a field for mediation. Because of the Great Islamic Divide and the individual ambitions behind it, there was simply no way to bring the disparate middle level states—Iran, Iraq, Saudi, Qatar, Turkey—

together about a common policy, and the more the Sunni states did come together, the more they riled the Shi'i states. But because of the hostility of the Gulfis, who considered Asad an outsider just like Qaddafi, Asad would not hear of any such efforts, and so they persisted in their divisive tactics. And because Brahmi was seeking a modification of that position, they would not hear him.

### **Staffan de Mistura's Mission**

Staffan de Mistura was appointed Special Envoy of the Secretary-General of the UN to Syria (SESG) in July 2014, not long after Brahimi left the post. In the previous decade and a half, he had been Special or Personal Representative of the Secretary-General in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Southern Lebanon, as well as holding various positions in the UN and the Italian Foreign Ministry. He spent the entire first year, including six weeks in the field and three months in involved capitals, in consultations toward bringing about the resurrection of the Geneva process, but also to “come up with initiatives, even if they are not necessarily the most effective ones.”<sup>45</sup> He described his approach as “a minimalistic, if you want, but concrete and realistic approach, what the UN can do at this stage.”<sup>46</sup> His three initiatives were all designed to augment the transition process with actions drawing on the first, lowest level to circumvent the top level stalemate—a representative constitutional committee, substantive informal discussion sessions, and local ceasefire freezes. From the beginning, like his predecessors, he emphasized that there was no military solution. “The one constant in this violently unpredictable conflict is that neither side will win.”<sup>47</sup>

### **The Geneva Process**

The basic charge for the SESG was the pursuit of full implementation of the Geneva Communiqué, as the basis for a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned conflict resolution political transition to end the conflict.<sup>48 49</sup> In May 2015 he started with a series of in-depth, separate consultations with the Syrian stakeholders and regional

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and international actors.<sup>50</sup> Following a year's attempts by de Mistura to establish a ceasefire to serve as the prelude for the revival of the Geneva process, the US, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Turkey met in Vienna in late October to revive the Geneva process through broad peace negotiations rather than local freezes. Within a week, the 20 states of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG)—which did not include the Syrian government or opposition—prepared a set of guidelines, issued as a formal Vienna Declaration on 15 November and endorsed as UNSC Resolution 2254 on 18 December, for a conclusive peace process to be relaunched by the end of the year. The talks were opened in Geneva at the end of January 2016 as the Syrian forces pressed their offensive around Aleppo with Russian air support. The government declared it would not meet with the “terrorists” and Russia said that the opposition High Negotiating Committee established at Riyadh in December to meet the government in the upcoming talks did not represent the opposition. The two sides refused to sit in the same room together and de Mistura suspended Geneva III at the beginning of February 2016 after five days, much as Geneva II had been adjourned by Brahimi two years earlier.

The SESG continued to press arrangements to recover the Geneva process. Agreement was finally reached on participation in a Geneva IV meeting by February 2017; when it began at the end of the month, it lasted a week. The procedures were accomplished rapidly enough but without substantive movement, as the two sides debated different agendas—the government focusing on counterterrorism and the opposition on transition; each essentially challenged the other's existence, the government considering the opposition as terrorists and the opposition working to remove the government. Geneva V in April 2017 “saw no breakthroughs—let us be frank—but no breakdown, either,” reported de Mistura to the Security Council.<sup>51</sup>

The VI Geneva round in May 2017 was the first time a joint UN-facilitated meeting of the government and opposition invitees in one room occurred, substantively discussing during

the whole day among themselves with the SESG.<sup>52 53</sup> “All agree on the need to de-escalate the fighting and form a UN-sponsored constitutional committee... But these commonalities risk getting lost, especially in the absence of serious international dialogue,”<sup>54</sup> Mouin Rabbani, who briefly served as the head of de Mistura’s political-affairs unit stated: “The mission became the extension of the mission.”<sup>55</sup> The SESG discerned incremental progress on joint meetings with opposition delegations at Geneva VII in July 2017 at which common positions were identified. But he also indicated the government has so far not provided concrete thinking on issues in the different baskets, particularly on a proposal regarding the schedule for drafting a new constitution.

Nearly two years after the first attempts to put substance into the Geneva process, the parties still did not engage in direct talks at Geneva VIII on 28 November to 14 December 2017. De Mistura told the UNSC, “The opportunity to begin real negotiation was not seized. A golden opportunity was missed.”<sup>56</sup> He cited four barriers, all from Damascus: The government rejected the Riyadh 2 statement’s condition for the exclusion of Iran and for the departure of Asad at the start of any transition period. It questioned whether the Opposition delegation was sufficiently representative, even though by then it was unified including the Moscow and Cairo platforms and the old or renewed Riyadh platform. Finally, it added – actually using a video on YouTube – that until full Syrian sovereignty was restored and terrorism defeated in all parts of the Syrian territory, it was not possible to entertain real movement on a constitutional review process or elections. “That to me was a new condition,” noted de Mistura.<sup>57</sup>

The four objections were reiteration of Syrian positions over the years and they signaled that the interparty talks had gotten nowhere. Two and a half years earlier, on de Mistura’s last trip to Damascus, he was allegedly told by Syria’s foreign minister that there was no room for external involvement in reforming the country’s constitution.<sup>58</sup> Yet, at the end of January 2018, de Mistura convened a special Geneva meeting in Vienna to

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focus specifically on the constitutional basket. “I also continue to pursue the convening, naturally, of the further formal intra-Syrian talks and advancing on all the four baskets of the political process in Geneva in accordance with resolution 2254,”<sup>59</sup> he told the UNSC in February.

### **New Initiatives**

From the beginning, de Mistura had other ideas to bring some movement into the peacemaking process. He developed three different initiatives with a focus on conflict resolution that were to occupy his tenure alongside the Geneva process itself. On his appointment, he stated “I do not have at this stage—and it would be presumptuous to have—a peace plan but I do have an action plan. The action plan is based on a bottom-up approach in order to do something concrete at the time when everybody seems to be desperate about what's going on in Syria,”<sup>60</sup> thus reversing the level of attack of his predecessors. The option was obvious, since the top-down approach had twice failed, but it was based on the assumption that the bottom did not depend on the top.

The first part of the plan was to return to the conflict management idea of ceasefire that had dissolved at the hands of the previous mediators and focus it on conflict resolution, building from the local level, specifically using neighborhood ceasefires to cobble together wider and wider, and so higher and higher, ... engulfing the second and third levels from the bottom. The idea of neighborhood ceasefires, or freezes, was focused on the same principle as the earlier ceasefire of Brahimi, to protect civilian population but also “to build first some political process at a local level and then eventually at the national level, to give some hope to the local population”.<sup>61</sup> It was proposed in a study prepared in the Geneva-based Center for Humanitarian Dialog (CHD) by Nir Rosen and was presented to the UNSC at the end of October 2014 early in de Mistura’s tenure (Kenner 2014). Local truces had already worked in a few scattered places—Zabadani, Homs, Barzah, Ras al-Ain<sup>62</sup>—but the envoy wanted a place of immense symbolic value, “rather like Sarajevo,” and

proposed Aleppo, Syria's second largest city, despite its fractured opposition and continuing combat between government and Da'esh (ISIS) forces.

In early 2015, de Mistura reported that the Syrian Government had committed to suspend all aerial attacks and artillery shelling over the entire city of Aleppo for six weeks to allow the UN to implement the pilot project of unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid and build incrementally from one district to others.<sup>63 64</sup> The freeze plan collapsed in February when the government launched a final offensive to starve out and eliminate the opposition enclaves, claiming it had signed on to no ceasefire. De Mistura felt betrayed and considered resignation.<sup>65</sup> When later, in May, he condemned the Syrian government for a barrel-bomb attack on Aleppo that killed at least 70 people, Assad cut off personal contact, the last time that de Mistura would meet with him personally and dashing all hope for agreement on a local freeze. In the future, he would be received only by lower-level officials.<sup>66</sup>

The ceasefire, the initial element in the Vienna Guidelines, was now in the hands of the upper level of states in the ISSC. Co-chaired by the US and Russia, the effort for a nation-wide ceasefire began with the collapse of Geneva III in February 2016. The ISSG immediately moved to reestablish and monitor a nationwide ceasefire, reset for the end of the same month. After six months of consultations under resurgent combat, the ceasefire was finally accepted for mid-September 2016 by the Syrian government and the opposition High Negotiating Committee, but after a week it was declared inoperative by the Syrian government.

Undaunted, de Mistura turned again to the parties, working to overcome divisions among the opposition factions that prevented the formation of a representative delegation. Turkey and Russia then undertook the ceasefire issue and achieved agreement in December. UNSCR 2401 of 24 February 2018 again called for a nationwide ceasefire in Syria for 30 days (but not to affect operations against ISIS and other terrorist groups as

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designated by the Security Council). A month later, de Mistura told the Security Council that cease-fire had failed.<sup>67</sup> It had lasted a week.

The second initiative of de Mistura was again an idea to work on conflict resolution with lower level activity beneath the transition deadlock. By establishing functional bodies with representatives from the two sides to address the matters of conflict termination, grouped into safety and protection, military and security, political and constitution, and institutions and development, the blocked formal talks could be circumvented. As proposed on 29 July 2015, the four working groups were to meet in Geneva under a UN chairmanship to restart substantive discussions with the open participation of all Syrian factions and eventually become a “fully powerful transitional authority,” as endorsed by the UNSC on 17 August.

The discussions in Geneva turned the four baskets of issues into 12 principles, —rather philosophical ideas— “twelve living points that can be further developed as the negotiations progress on the substance,” issued at the end of November 2017.<sup>68</sup> They covered sovereignty and unity, governance and democracy, separation of powers and human rights, religion and the state, decentralization, measures against terrorism, respect for all Syria’s components, full participation of women, right to return for refugees, among others. Sessions were convened in Geneva in late February 2017.<sup>69</sup> However, in September the Syrian government refused de Mistura’s invitation to take part in meetings to address constitutional and legal issues;<sup>70</sup> the initiative got lost in the attempts to renew the Geneva process and its alternatives.

De Mistura’s third conflict resolution initiative, this time within the Geneva process, was on the creation of a Constitutional Committee to draft a new Syrian constitution and eventually lead to UN-backed elections. After intensive consultations with all levels after Geneva V, he said “I believe the time has come for the UN to provide specific elaborations on the constitutional and electoral baskets (2 and 3) and how they relate to

governance and counter-terrorism, security governance and confidence-building measures (1 and 4) and develop agreed and clear modalities for the full implementation of UNSCR 2254, and stimulate wider consultations as well.”<sup>71</sup> The two institutions emerging from discussions on the constitution-making process were to be a Constitutional Commission to prepare an initial draft and a National Conference which could oversee a national dialogue and refer any draft constitution for popular approval—as laid out in UNSCR 2254. Keeping a key role in the process, de Mistura indicated that “both institutions should have their mandate, terms of reference, powers, rules of procedure, agreed in UN-facilitated intra-Syrian talks in Geneva.”<sup>72</sup>

The constitutional commission was to comprise 50 Government delegates, a 50-member broadly representative opposition delegation; and 50 Syrian experts, civil society figures, independents, tribal leaders and women; a core group of 15 from each delegation would act as the drafting committee, to submit their results to the larger committee for approval, according to the Sochi National Dialog Congress of January 2018 and consistent with UNSCR 2254. Syria provided its list at the end of May, with Russia and Iran’s support; a list was received from the opposition a month later, with support from other states. De Mistura convened top level representatives of Iran, Russia and Turkey on 10-11 September 2018 in Geneva when it became clear that, unlike the first two lists, “the middle third list — the list for which I have a particular responsibility to facilitate and then to finalize— was significantly questioned” and issues such as chairing, voting and the rules of procedure were left unresolved.<sup>73</sup>

At the end of September 2018, the Syrian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Al-Moualem met with the Secretary-General and de Mistura to call for a fundamental reassessment of the work that had been done on the middle-third list and rules of procedure, as well as on the United Nations facilitation role.<sup>74</sup> Russia and Iran also significantly questioned the middle-third list. De Mistura defended his list at length to the UNSC on

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17 October 2018. “Before the end of the month I also intend to invite the Astana guarantors for consultation with me in Geneva and to engage with the small-group countries. In my view that would be our final opportunity to put the finishing touches to the preparations for convening a constitutional committee. I would then hope to be in a position to issue invitations to convene the committee, if possible during November.” Of the meeting in late October “within the context of the Geneva process,<sup>75</sup> he reported, “I intend to strike while the iron is hot and try to move the Geneva process ahead in consultation with all concerned.”<sup>76</sup>

### **Russian Replacement of the Geneva Process**

In fact, the iron had been heating elsewhere. As the Geneva process strained, a competitor arose: Russia and Turkey moved to fill the vacuum left by the water treading in the Geneva process and two years of pressure provided by the massacre of civilians and the stalemate of combatants. When Russia moved in militarily to prop up the tired regime with air power on 15 September 2015, it also sought a diplomatic cover to accompany its efforts. While the Syrian government improved its military position with Russian help, Russia opened its diplomatic initiative with Turkey, soon joined by Iran, by offering Astana in Kazakhstan as a “neutral” alternative site to Geneva for the peace negotiations, with good offices from the trio. Proposed in mid-December 2016, the meeting took place with Syrian representatives from both sides at the end of the month and declared an immediate ceasefire. A month later the sides met together at Astana IIb for an agreement by the mediators to form a joint monitoring body to enforce the ceasefire and the preparation of a Russian draft constitution. The agreement was reaffirmed in Astana III in March and three de-escalations zones—an enlargement of de Mistura’s idea of local freezes—in the south, in Eastern Ghouta (Damascus), and north of Homs—were established at Astana IV in May 2017. Yet by Astana V in July neither the ceasefire nor the constitution draft was signed by the two sides, although de

Mistura said they were making clear progress to reducing violence.<sup>77</sup>

The same issues were discussed and a fourth zone was created in Idlib at Astana VI in September—with two others in Ifrin and Eastern Qalamoun brokered by Russia<sup>78</sup>—and discussions concentrated on working groups on the exchange of missing persons, POWs and detainees at Astana VII in 29 October; eight months later “the outcome has been zero.”<sup>79</sup> Discussions continued inconclusively at Astana VIII in December reflecting the same blockages as at Geneva.

Russia then sought to jumpstart the process and convened a Congress of National Dialog of some 1500 Syrians from all sides in Sochi to initiate the selection of the National Committee to draft the constitution mandated by UNSCR 2254. Disputes over the delegates to the Dialog ended its session after one day, on 30 January 2018, but it did affirm that a Constitutional Committee should be formed “of Government, Opposition representatives in the intra-Syrian talks – which means those which are facilitated by the UN in Geneva – [and] Syrian experts, civil society, independents, tribal leaders and women.”<sup>80</sup> It endorsed the 12 living principles and called for a list of candidates for the constitutional committee of 150 with a drafting committee of 45, and recognized the role of the UNSESG as facilitator of the process.” The following year was spent in a “marathon of consultation” to implement the charge, culminating the foreign ministers’ meeting of the three supporting states at Sochi (de Mistura 20 Dec 2018).

Although on a separate track, the UN envoy threw his weight behind the talks, saying that they “should be seen as laying the basis for a renewed Geneva process.”<sup>81</sup> “Astana must bring forth Geneva and vice versa. That is why the United Nations will be in Tehran and Astana, and provide whatever technical support it can to what we consider a very important step,” he told the UNSC after Astana III.<sup>82</sup> On Astana IV, “In my modest opinion, Astana produced a promising step — a memorandum between the three guarantors on the creation of de-

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escalation zones...[whose] precise areas and ambit will become clear only when the guarantors complete the extremely important so-called mapping process... We should therefore urge together the ceasefire guarantors to address those details quickly, diligently and fairly within the time frame they themselves stipulated in the memorandum.”<sup>83</sup> “From the point of view of the sponsors of Astana, de Mistura’s role was to lend it international legitimacy,” said Rabbani. “And I don’t think he realized that he was basically blessing his own irrelevance.”<sup>84</sup>

Yet he continued to work for collaboration between the competing processes. In November 2017, before Astana V and Geneva VII, both of which he attended, he told the UNSC, “The UN team continues to stand ready to provide technical advice, whenever and wherever needed. Because we need a success in Astana, as Astana desperately needs a success in the Geneva political process in order to consolidate what we are all trying to do. Let’s give de-escalation efforts a fair chance to succeed...”<sup>85</sup> Preparing for Geneva VIII, “the ideal trajectory over the coming two weeks would be: progress in Astana [V] on 4-5 July; then a further set of joint technical expert meetings with the opposition groups in the same week; and then a continued discussion and dialogue hopefully among international stakeholders... And all this in support of both the Astana de-escalation efforts and the intra-Syrian Geneva-based political process. I hope that a combination of these elements would help shape an environment conducive for the next round of intra-Syrian talks in Geneva in the months to come, and bring us one step forward on the journey towards our shared goal of implementing the resolutions of this Council, in particular 2254.”<sup>86</sup>

As the attempts at negotiation continued, he urged a more active merger of the processes. After Astana VI, he reported, “The Astana effort should be seen as laying the basis for a renewed Geneva process... the time has come for the focus to return to Geneva, and the intra-Syrian talks under the auspices of the United Nations – yourselves. That is the only forum in which the transitional political process envisaged by this Council

in resolution 2254 can be developed with the Syrian parties themselves, with the full legitimacy that the UN provides and the backing of the international community.”<sup>87</sup> Again, in September before Geneva VIII and Astana VII, he worked with Saudi Arabia to unite the opposition delegation, but he spoke more insistently. “The Astana effort should be seen as laying the basis for a renewed Geneva process”<sup>88</sup> He briefed the Security Council. “So the next Astana meeting should focus on putting the existing arrangements back on track... you [the UN Security Council] have solely mandated the United Nations, [...] to advance the intra-Syrian political negotiation process for a political solution to the conflict – and no one else.”<sup>89</sup>

After the Congress on National Dialog at the end of January 2018, de Mistura explained to the UNSC his decision to attend the rival meeting (opening session only, since all non-Syrians except Russian Minister Lavrov were excluded): “It was a carefully considered decision, made after special consultations in Vienna with the Syrian parties and with the Russian Federation — and not just by me, but involving the Secretary-General himself, too. Based on those consultations, the United Nations had reason to believe that Sochi would contribute to accelerating the Geneva process.”<sup>90</sup> “We pressed the Astana guarantors at that meeting and before to make progress on the crucial issue, which to us, is one of the main reasons we attend meetings in Astana,” he told the UNSC in February 2018.

De Mistura’s technical team participated in the first meeting of the Working Group on detainees and missing persons that took place in Astana in March.; “the issue ... was first raised in Astana a year ago and, sadly, no concrete progress has been made so far.”<sup>91</sup> By May “the outcome has been zero.”<sup>92</sup> Six weeks after the National Dialogue Congress in Sochi, de Mistura had not yet received the complete inputs on the pool of candidates for a constitutional committee developed in Sochi, from the three guarantors. He reiterated that the government of Syria continued to refuse to engage on the committee’s formation, and in consultations he raised the possibility of establishing interim

arrangements and timelines to begin its work. “We have never had for any length of time a nation-wide ceasefire or confidence-building measures that [had] been asked for in resolution 2254.”<sup>93</sup> At the end of November, De Mistura announced that he would step down as SESG for family reasons.<sup>94</sup> Astana XII continued in late April and July 2019, after de Mistura’s tenure was ended, and reached no agreement even among the host trio on basic issues.<sup>95</sup>

### **What Went Wrong?**

Staffan de Mistura was the longest serving of the three Special Envoys—four years and four months, more than twice the terms of his predecessors combined. He was persistent, active, imaginative, and innovative, and diligently optimistic. He continually consulted a wide range of parties—even after he was refused entry by Asad; he engaged in rival processes to manage the conflict; and he reported comprehensively to the UN Security Council, his mandator. He had a number of good ideas, for another context. His “living principles” were like declaiming the Sermon on the Mount to the fleets in Caesar’s battle of the Nile. Yet the initiatives left a legacy that will be helpful elsewhere, if not in Syria. His constitutional emphasis and the balanced committee which caused him much trouble are necessary procedural steps in the transition process; his local ceasefires can be the undergirding foundation on which a conflict management superstructure rests; and his informal discussions sessions can air ideas and plumb differences that formal debates could not yet take on. But in Syria, they ignored the structure and evolution of the conflict.

De Mistura started with the assumption that neither side could win. Unfortunately, the assumption was not shared by the parties. The Special Envoy seems to have spent little time on ripening the parties’ perceptions of their situation, like his predecessors, but instead tried to move ahead working on procedures as if ripeness had occurred. De Mistura’s initiatives, which to varying extents focused on lower level actions to

circumvent, assist, or parallel upper level (in)action, fell into the same swamp of delay and resistance that characterized the ceasefires and the Geneva processes. Geneva was an exercise in repeated failure but the alternative process under new ownership at Astana, after two and a half years, fell before the same internal wrangling among the conflicting parties and their patrons.

The Special Envoy never had control of the Geneva-mandated process of establishing a Syrian transition, but he at least worked within the successive UN Security Council resolutions as his appointed assignment. When an alternative process was established, it undermined the Geneva process and left the Special Envoy outside of its competitor that was designed to replace its inactivity.<sup>96</sup> The Special Envoy's increasing efforts to assert the continuing viability and predominance of Geneva and his instructions to Astana via the Security Council were sad and desperate attempts to reassert control of the process. If Syrian obstructionism and refusal to accept any role for either peace process in the establishment of a constitution was the insurmountable obstacle to any movement, it was made possible by the dereliction of the Security Council members to support their Special Envoy. He was sent on a diplomatic suicide mission.

### **Conclusion and Lessons**

What were the techniques, styles, strategies of the mediators against the challenges they faced, and what lessons can be learned for mediation? Annan focused on developing the guidelines for a way out of the conflict, which were necessarily ambiguous in order to achieve a consensus even among the limited number of subscribers. Brahimi strove to get them implemented and put into practice, which brought to light the very details of dispute that had been hidden to achieve passage. His job was necessarily long, and further prolonged by the chemical weapons interruption, which paradoxically further strengthened and legitimized the regime. Longer still than the first two combined, de Mistura's activities followed a number of strategies, from spreading local ceasefires to pressing for a constitutional

committee to reviving the Geneva process many times. But they all fell apart and the new Astana process set up by the spoilers—Russia, Iran, Turkey—was also stopped short of any substantive progress at the hands of the Syrian government they supported.

*Mandate:* The mediators appeared to have broad mandates, enjoyed high prestige, and faced no competing mediation missions until the end. Yet the members of the mandating agency did not follow through with support for the mediators' efforts. The mediators' reaction was to appeal to the UNSC to support its own mandate. Annan set up an Action Group on Syria to translate his plan into the Geneva Communiqué; it was not endorsed by the UNSC until two years later in a different context (chemical weapons), but it became a permanent template for settlement of the conflict. De Mistura pleaded to the UNSC to back its own Geneva process against the Astana rival.

Syria's ability to obstruct the whole process and to refuse to accept any role for either Geneva or Astana in the establishment of a constitution was the insurmountable obstacle to any movement and was made possible by the dereliction of the Security Council members in not supporting the mandate. Only Russia had the means to persuade Syria to accept the all-Syrian process organized in the Constitutional Committee that de Mistura had worked to set up, and if the Astana process made any progress, it was because a mandator—Russia—put its diplomatic weight behind it.

*Entry:* The fact that the objective conditions of stalemate were at no time more than superficially felt by both parties and their supporters as a mutually hurting stalemate meant that the conflict was simply not ripe for effective mediation, and any strategy for ripening it ran the risk of having the ripener declared mediator non grata, as happened to all three. While cultivating the parties' perception of a hurting stalemate, mediators must keep the ear of the parties, not getting too far ahead or leaning too heavily on them. Rather, a stable, self-serving—although

scarcely soft—stalemate took hold in which the warring sides believed negotiations to be more and protracted stalling less costly for them than continuing a war, and the mediator was never able to turn entry into participation in the process.

Annan's principles failed, in good part because the two sides had not yet tested their relative capacities in all out combat. Brahimi tried but was unable to shake the various parties' illusion of military victory, and neither wanted negotiation that would require incorporating the other side in a settlement. Working through the Great Power sponsors, the mediators were only able to drag the conflicting parties "kicking and screaming," in Brahimi's words,<sup>97</sup> to Geneva II to IX. De Mistura too started with the assumption that neither side could win but then tried to move ahead by working on procedures as if ripeness had occurred. He tried to walk around the absence of ripeness with his "new" approaches and his 12 living principles; as a result he lost control of the process.

As the conflict continued, the Syrian government began to have objective evidence that it could indeed win, with Russian help, while the opposition continued to cling to the conviction that it could not afford to lose, and on that basis continued to squabble among itself. While Annan and Brahimi called off their respective Geneva sessions, de Mistura did the contrary and pursued six more Geneva sessions with no effect except to keep the rival Astana process company.

*Strategy:* After detailed canvasses of the three levels of actors, the mediators soon felt that the positions of the first and second circles were so firmly locked in that the only level on which to operate was the third, on US-Russian relations. They figured that if the interests of the top of the layers could be brought into sync and if that layer could be brought to unhook its interests from those of the lower two levels, the latter would be obliged to come along. However, there was a catch-22 in the circle of choices: the outer circle members had their interests in not moving, and they were able to hide behind the intransigence

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of the inner circle parties, who were in turn strengthened by the intransigence of the outer circle. They believed the Russians saw Asad's course as unsustainable, and sought to convince Russia that if it became co-manager of a peaceful power transition under the Annan plan, it could preserve the Syrian state and Russian influence in it (which is, ironically what happened under different circumstances after the three mediators had left).<sup>98</sup> Annan and Brahimi arguably overestimated Russian leverage over the Asad regime (or Russian desire to use that leverage) and the course of the Astana process showed the inability of Russia to deliver during de Mistura's tenure. Asad and Putin were hiding behind each other.

All three mediators used ceasefires in an effort to bring some initial flexibility into the positions. As Brahimi explained, there are two type of ceasefire—from a war perspective to evacuate civilians without affecting ongoing hostilities and in a peace perspective to provide a breathing time or space in the conflict. Twice (Annan and Brahimi) they saw a ceasefire in a war context as a conflict management action to evacuate civilians; de Mistura's *tache d'huile*, or creeping freeze tactic of the second type, was to expand islands of peace into large areas but it turned into the first type after 2015 and was simply savaged by the Syrian government. The first had a humanitarian purpose, to save innocent civilians from being casualties, but also a strategic one, to shame the combatants. The one outcome of Geneva II was the Syrian release of 6,000 women and children; for Brahimi the measure was a recognition “that you cannot start negotiations about Syria without having some discussions about the very, very bad humanitarian situation.”<sup>99</sup> That fact—or observation—was recognition of the inherent limits on Syrian shame, and participation.

Critics who criticized the choice of focus confuse the ideal situation with the real context: The parties of the first level were locked in an existential perception of the conflict, both believing not only that they could, but that they had to hold out. Asad was not moving, the opposition was at sixes and sevens

(literally), and none of the three SESGs had the leverage to move either party. Had Russia not entered the fray in 2015, Asad would have been in a much weaker position but would most likely hold on as long as he could. He felt he *dare* not lose. Everyone in the conflict felt it was there for the right reasons, and was interested in managing or resolving only on its own terms.

The mediators were also criticized for not leaning on the regional powers who gave the parties the resources and encouragement to continue the fight. Annan vainly tried to get the Saudis and Qataris invested in his plan; Turkey, although invited to the Geneva I conclave, urged its clients in the Syrian National Council to reject the Communiqué. The fact that the succession of plans—Arab League, Annan Principles, Geneva Communiqué, Clinton-Lavrov, Kerry-Lavrov—were very similar potentially offered the Arab states, the source of the original plan, a chance to unite behind the mediator to bring the two Syrian sides together. For multiple reasons, the second level states preferred sticking with their clients and so fell prey to the same inaction as the first level. De Mistura was able to convince second level states, notably Saudi Arabia, to bring the disparate opposition together behind a list of constitutional commission members, a tiny important procedural step.

From the point of view of mediation theory, the UN attempts had two faults. A general rule of thumb of negotiation is that one should not demand as a precondition what one hopes to gain in negotiation. To do so would remove an item of exchange for the other party. All mediators urged a relaxation of the precondition that Asad had to go and should have no part in a negotiated settlement before negotiations could begin. The demand was shot down by a precondition from Asad's side, and the two preconditions blocked each other. De Mistura did not even try to break open the block.

The UN mediation was one of two types: for reconciliation and for transition. The aim of the Syrian mediation, in crude terms, was to engineer regime change and the replacement of the

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Asad regime. Strict evenhandedness (Impartiality, *Guidance*, 10-11) is required for the first, a certain direction for the second. Yet even mediation for transition requires a fair and balanced treatment of the parties; Asad did not feel that he received such, and he took the efforts to create a realization of a hurting stalemate as proof of bias.

*Inclusivity:* Inclusivity was a major thrust for Brahimi, perhaps more than for Annan or de Mistura. Inclusivity meant all the second and third level factions, or at least those capable of disrupting an agreement if left out, but the more parties were to be brought in, the more agreement becomes difficult. It also meant bringing in Iran on the second level. The test of inclusivity is practical: whether any excluded party can disrupt an agreement or whether an included party can prevent an agreement. At Geneva I, the excluded parties on the third and second levels did not prevent a useful agreement in the Communiqué but were needed to complement it with agreement on the details and on its implementation, which even the included parties could not agree on. Through Geneva II until the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the US was firmly opposed to full Iranian participation. By the time of de Mistura, Iran was included in the rival process.

Since no party really believed that there was “no military solution”, it was a mistake to go to Geneva II. As Brahimi summarized with inside insight, everyone was under pressure to just “do something, but we went to Geneva II with very little conviction that it would lead anywhere. The government was clear [as] daylight in August that they were only there because of the Russians and did nothing but parrot the claim that the opposition were terrorists. The opposition...didn’t represent anybody; for them, getting rid of al-Asad would resolve all issues... The players still think of military solutions and nobody is exhausted to such an extent as to accept a mediator voluntarily, the only thing that the UN can offer. It was very different in Taif [on Lebanon

in 1989] when the warring parties welcomed any suggestion by a mediator because they wanted to end it.”

All of the UN mediators made busy use of their staffs to continue contacts that they themselves were unable to continue (in Brahimi’s and de Mistura’s case because Assad refused to see them and left contacts to their staffs). All faced strong dissidence at some point from their staffs, although a common thread other than personality is hard to discern. Brahimi had his Nasir al-Qidwa, who left in disagreement over approaches. In his first year, de Mistura lost his political director Mouin Rabbani in a damaging outburst.<sup>100</sup>

*Leverage:* In this situation, the substantive leverage available to the mediators over the parties’ positions on any level was minimal; the most available was procedural leverage, urging the conflicting parties to attend Geneva to defend those positions. Media reports continually used the term “urged” to capture the means of influence of the mediators. Without the means to threaten or promise, the mediators were reduced to warnings and predictions. The extremely high costs imposed on the population, who remained voiceless and unrepresented, were cited but ineffectively. Annan had no leverage to bring the neighbors into his plan, only persuasion, which had no weight, and his successors had none either; only states on the other two levels had leverage. The lack of leverage took its toll on the mediators as well, who took on the job with no illusions. Annan resigned after five months, Brahimi after seven and then eighteen months, de Mistura was disillusioned at a number of points but persisted doggedly with patience and pathos.

One could argue that engagement with the regime could, in principle, have shifted its calculations toward compliance. Annan had deliberately framed his initiative as a “Syrian-led” political process” to avoid raising a regime defensive reaction against encroachment on its sovereignty. To more fully incentivize the regime to cooperate it might have been allowed more input into the shaping of the 6-point plan. Part of the Annan plan

envisioned the regime appointing an interlocutor to negotiate the precise nature of the transitional executive to which full powers were to be transferred (although Annan himself was such an interlocutor); but discussions which Annan planned as his next step were aborted by the Houla massacre. The Syrian government could have been invited to Geneva I; not having been invited Assad was not invested in the outcome: he told Annan “it’s not my thing. I was not there.” For Annan and Brahimi, Assad refused to discuss any plan that provided for his departure. By the time of de Mistura, Syria refused to involve any foreigners in discussion of its future. That ended whatever was left of UN mediation.

In sum, arguably the regime was unshakably committed to a strategy of survival and was uninterested in negotiating as long as it did not have to. By 2012, it had Russian military support, which only grew in the following years. The diplomatic game was played for diplomatic purposes, not to find a solution. As Brahimi remarked to the government delegation: “I’m sure that your instructions were: ‘Go to Geneva, only don’t make any concessions, don’t discuss anything seriously.’”<sup>101</sup> Thus, getting any movement depended on changing the regime’s estimate on the chances of holding out, and as their own unassisted ability weakened, that was in Russia’s hands, not the mediators’. It was Russia that had leverage, not the UN Secretary-General’s Personal Envoys. Arguably, the US could have had leverage too, if it had chosen to use it. The opposition was bound by a compound fear of their opponent: they feared the government’s centralized coherence in the face of their own disorder and the government’s duplicity in all its past offers of reforms and elections, and so were unwilling to run any risks. Without leverage of his own, without support from the mandators, without the means to ripen an unripe (and further unripening) situation, there was little that a UN mediator could do except urge. The Personal Envoys’ failure was the Security Council’s failure, and more broadly, in terms of its own mission, the UN’s failure.

One can propose many alternatives, out of context, and many critics have done so. They all run up against the situation on the ground, or the mediators' experiential reading of it, operatively the same thing, which is authoritative. The mediators enjoyed the highest prestige and a finely-honed sense of persuasion. They cultivated and counted on the Great Powers' felt need for an end to the conflict and they laid out a process that could have taken them there. But the locals did not see it that way; they did not and indeed dared not see a process to be shared with the other side, and in this view they entrapped their patrons. The mediators urged hard—incredibly hard and patiently against obvious odds—but deep underneath the parties were not interested and their patrons buttressed their disinterest.

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<sup>1</sup> This article is part of the Uppsala University Conflict Prevention and Resolution project on Mediation in the Arab World which it will publish in a shorter version in Isak Svensson ed., *Mediation in the Arab World*, (pending). Partially drawn from Hinnebusch, Raymond, and I. William Zartman, *UN Mediation in the Syrian Crisis* (International Peace Institute, 2016) for sections on Annan and Brahimi. The third section on de Mistura enjoyed the research assistance of Mees van der Werf.

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<sup>4</sup> Victor Kremenyuk, ed. *Negotiation Analysis* (Jossey-Bass, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> *Guidance*, 6-7.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12; 18-19.

<sup>7</sup> Sylvie Mahieu, "When Should Mediators Interrupt a Civil War? The Best Timing for a Ceasefire," *International Negotiation*, 12:2 (2007): 207-28.

<sup>8</sup> *Guidance*, 8-9.

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<sup>14</sup> Salman Shaikh, "Annan's Mission Impossible: Why is everyone pretending that the U.N. plan in Syria has a prayer of succeeding?" *Foreign Policy*, May 8, 2012. Available online at: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/05/08/annans-mission-impossible/>

<sup>15</sup> Grieg, "Intractable Syria," 53.

<sup>16</sup> Magnus Lundgren, "Peace making in Syria: Barriers and Opportunities," *Swedish Institute of International Affairs*, (2015).; Andreas Beck, "Why Annan Failed and Brahimi Struggles: The Challenges of Mediation in Syria," *Diplomatic Courier*, May 30, 2013. Available online at: <https://www.diplomaticcourier.com/posts/why-annan-failed-and-brahimi-struggles-the-challenges-of-mediation-in-syria-2>.

<sup>17</sup> In an interview recounted in Tom Hill, "The Strategic Thought of Kofi Annan: What Annan was Trying to do in Syria in 2012 and why he quit," unpublished paper, 2015, 34.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Aaronson, "Has Kofi Annan Failed in Syria?" *E-International Relations*, 30 May, 2012. Available online at: <http://www.e-ir.info/2012/05/30/has-kofi-annan-failed-in-syria/>

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<sup>23</sup> Julian Borger and Bastien Inzaurre, "West 'ignored Russian offer in 2012 to have Syria's Assad step aside'," *The Guardian*, 15 September, 2015.

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<sup>34</sup> Charbel, “Brahimi: Geneva I Communique was ‘superficial.’”

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## 42 POST-UPRISING EXCAVATIONS

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## 2

### **Palestinians in the Syrian Uprising: *The Situation on the Ground***

**ASHRAF MOUSA**

#### **Introduction**

At the outset of the Syrian civil war, Syria was home to 495,970 Palestinian refugees (149,822 living in official camps),<sup>1</sup> most of whom had entered, or were descended from individuals who had entered the country in 1948. These refugees, while not technically Syrian citizens, were closely integrated into the Syrian state, enjoying effectively identical rights to Syrian citizens, but retaining a close ideological affiliation to the Palestinian national cause. The Syrian regime also maintained and funded a number of Palestinian resistance organizations, while relating to others in various different ways over time.<sup>2</sup>

When the protests that would escalate into the Syrian revolution and then the Syrian civil war began in 2011, Palestinians living in Syria found themselves on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, they had reason to be grateful to the regime, which had rooted its claims to legitimacy in its staunch support for the Palestinian cause.<sup>3</sup> And yet on the other, this same argument could also be reframed as entailing a debt of gratitude to the Syrian *people* in their liberation struggle. On top of this, Palestinians needed to factor in the divergent positions taken by the key Palestinian factions, the regime's long cultivation of loyalist Palestinian front groups and, of course, the self-interested question of which side was likely to win.

This study seeks to shed light on how and why Palestinian communities in Syria arrived at the political positions they ultimately did in relation to the conflict. In order to do so, it draws on a combination of pre-existing studies published in Arabic, including those mentioned above, as well as the author's own extensive direct experience as a Syrian Palestinian political

scientist who was present in Syria during the initial years of the war. During this period, the author had numerous opportunities to visit and spend time in several refugee camps between 2012 and 2016, including the two discussed in detail here, as well as to speak to individuals involved in the events occurring there. (Formal fieldwork would, of course, not have been permitted to a Syrian academic during this period). Since then, this picture has been updated with informal conversations and correspondences with a personal network of friends and acquaintances from these camps.

Taking a case study approach, the paper seeks to compare and contrast the experiences of Palestinians living in two camps in particular: Neirab camp, which is located on the outskirts of Aleppo, and Daraa refugee camp, which is located some distance from the city after which it is named.

### **Previous Studies**

The subject of the role played by Palestinians in the Syrian civil war is virtually untouched in the academic literature available in English, and indeed there is apparently not a great deal of material that deals with Palestinians in Syria at all. The most comprehensive treatment is Neil Gabiam's book *The Politics of Suffering: Syria's Palestinian Refugee Camps*, which deals with questions of Palestinian political identity in the context of the urbanization of the camps.<sup>4</sup> Similar concerns are reflected in other studies, such as Brand's 1988 paper addressing the supposed dilemma of "integration",<sup>5</sup> and Hanafi's 2010 chapter which, by contrast, draws on the experience of Palestinians in Lebanon and Syria to critique the idea of the refugee camp itself.<sup>6</sup>

In Arabic, the topic has been addressed in a significant number of media comment pieces and research papers. However, few of these go into any considerable depth. The overall situation of Palestinians in Syria is also the subject of a monograph by Yousef Zidane and Yousef Fakhreddine. Published in 2013, this provides an extensive and detailed overview of the

subject, including invaluable casualty figures for Palestinians in the conflict. However, the book's analytical content is somewhat limited.<sup>7</sup>

Professor Osama Mohammed Abu Nahal's "The position of the Palestinian Authority and Hamas with regard to the Syrian crisis, and reflections on the future of the Palestinian cause", as its title suggests, is mainly concerned with the way in which the Syrian war impacted on the leadership of the dominant Palestinian factions as opposed to the situation of Palestinians on the ground, (or for that matter, factions other than Fatah and Hamas). More problematically, the author tends to treat the factions he deals with in a monolithic fashion, meaning that he does not take account of the important ways in which the Syrian revolutionary cause placed considerable strain between the official position of the factions' official leadership and their rank-and-file members. He also, in my view, misreads the position of Hamas, which he believes to have been one of full engagement in the conflict.

Despite these limitations, Professor Abu Nahal does acknowledge the inherently contradictory situation in which Palestinian refugees in Syria found themselves after the outbreak of Syrian popular protest, given the positions taken by the major Palestinian factions. His ultimate conclusion is that the fall of the Syrian regime, for all its flaws, would at present be a disaster for the Palestinian cause. Whoever might assume power after it would be bound to return the favour to those who had supported it militarily, such as the United States, Turkey or other Arab states.

Another significant study is "The Palestinians in Syria and the Syrian Revolution" by Salah Hassan of The Arab Centre for Research and Political Studies. This study concerns the position of Palestinians towards the Syrian civil war and deals with these positions from many different perspectives. In contrast to Abu Nahal's work, then, it does to some extent consider the positions taken by ordinary Palestinians and the Palestinian general public, as well as those taken by the political leadership and elites.

However, it is largely concerned with history and concentrates on the events that occurred in Yarmuk refugee camp only, without considering the bigger picture of the other refugee camps, and the role of geographical position in relation to the key events of the revolution in the formation of the general mood of each camp in favour of one grouping or another. The study concludes that the Palestinians would do best to support the Syrian uprising, taking into account moral and political considerations, and that the position of neutrality is to be rejected. He urges that those Palestinian factions which have fought alongside the regime should be isolated.

The Yarmuk refugee camp also appears as a case study in a work by Ayman Abu Hashim, appropriately titled: "The Impact of the Syrian Revolution on the Palestinians of Syria – a Case Study of Al-Yarmouk Refugee Camp: Aspects of Intervention and Interaction", focusing on how events in the camp influenced the events that occurred in Syria. Unlike the studies above, it sets out a Palestinian perspective on what happened in the camps. But the study does not concern all the segments, levels and groupings which represent the Palestinians in general, and their perspective concerning the events they lived through in Syria.

Finally, "The Palestinians in Syria: Between the Hammer of the Revolution and the Anvil of the Regime" by Tariq Aziza of the Centre for Palestinian Studies is an attempt to impartially understand the reasons that pushed Palestinians to become engaged in the Syrian uprising. Aziza, however, seems to view the Palestinians as a homogenous group without engaging with the details of the Palestinian situation, or drawing distinctions between Palestinians' many positions and alignments. It also researches into the history of the relationship between Palestinians and the Syrian regime, reducing 'the Palestinians' to the Fatah movement. This study argues that it would be in the best interest of Palestinians to distance themselves from the conflict and refrain from fighting in it to the extent possible. Indeed, neutrality, despite its shortcomings, is the least-worst option.

As this brief review shows, the material in Arabic, while going deeper into the subject than studies available in English, tends to be politically engaged and opinion based, as well as tending to view Palestinian political positions as indistinguishable from the official stances taken by the Palestinian political leadership. And yet – as I shall now explain – this is far from an accurate reflection of how Palestinian politics has actually played out for those Palestinians caught up in the Syrian conflict.

### **Palestinians in Syria at the outset of the conflict**

In the first months of the Syrian uprising, the general sentiment among Syria's Palestinians was that it was best not to get involved in what was seen as a fundamentally Syrian political issue. Involvement, such as it was, was limited to individuals, and “focused on providing relief and medical aid to those trapped in the hotspots and displaced persons from their rebellious neighborhood, this happened in Daraa camp and later on in Alramel camp in Lattakia and the Alaedon camp in Homs”.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, as the conflict progressed, Palestinians found it increasingly impossible to avoid deeper and more partisan involvement. This didn't necessarily entail physical mobilization into the fighting – many Palestinians supported one side or another but did not take up arms. Where Palestinians fought with the regime, they did so by means of the same structures for the mobilization of Palestinians that had existed before the war – that is to say, in specifically Palestinian units created by and loyal to the regime.<sup>9</sup> Conversely, Palestinians who physically took up arms against the regime (which seems to have been uncommon, in contrast to those who supported the rebels ideologically) did so by joining the same rebel units as Syrians.<sup>10</sup>

### **Possible reasons for Palestinian involvement**

Overall, five factors can be identified as plausibly significant in pushing Palestinians in Syria towards mobilizing on one side or another, namely: factional affiliation, geographical proximity, demographic overlap, ideological convictions and provocations,

in addition to, of course, material incentives and sanctions. I will now discuss these in turn.

### **Factional Affiliation**

Most of the Palestinians in Syria, and elsewhere, belong to or support one or other of the Palestinian factions. As a result, when these factions mobilized on one side or the other, this inevitably tended to mean that they took their followers with them (although, as we shall see, this was by no means a given). Indeed, differences between the positions of factional leaderships and rank-and-file members have put Palestinian factions under considerable strain.<sup>11</sup> The lack of unity, however, both among the different factions and within them, meant that there was no unified reference point for all Palestinians which might have led them towards a united position. The Palestinian Authority (PA) and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) did not deal with the issue of Palestinian refugees in Syria in a responsible manner, “and their position was inadequate and shocking and gave rise to complacency among Syrian Palestinians, who hoped that the PLO and the PA would play a greater role in protecting and defending them”.<sup>12</sup>

### **Geographical Proximity**

As the battle lines of the Syrian civil war were drawn, Palestinian refugee camps frequently turned out to be near the hot spots of the conflict. This made any attempt to keep a distance from it literally unsustainable. As Baytari notes, for example, “Al-Yarmouk camp, which is the largest Palestinian camp in Syria, is located among the neighborhoods of Qadam, Tadamon, and al-Hajar al-Aswad. All these neighborhoods were hot spots, and places where security was threatened.”<sup>13</sup> Homs camp (Alaaedon) was in the same situation, being close to the Baba Amr neighborhood, which was considered the area in the city of Homs where conflict was most intense.

### **Demographic overlap**

As a consequence of the gradual integration of Palestinians and their refugee camps into Syrian society, Palestinian camps have become home to an increasing population of Syrians, living side by side with Palestinian neighbours. The Yarmuk camp, for example, has a mixed population of Syrians and Palestinians. On the other hand, many Palestinians live in Syrian cities alongside native Syrian people. Many Palestinians, for example, lived in the city of Aleppo, far from their camps (Neirab and Ein Al-Tal). According to Badwan, as many as 29% of Palestinian refugees reside within cities in Syria.<sup>14</sup>

### **Ideological convictions**

For Palestinians in Syria in general, partisan involvement was a particularly agonizing step precisely because there was no single political narrative which clearly favoured either the rebel or regime sides. Nevertheless, many individual Palestinians developed strong convictions based on their reading of Palestinian history in Syria.

Palestinians who opposed the regime believed that they were obligated to the Syrian people for their hospitality since the *Nakba* when they had been forced to flee to Syria. The Syrian people had received the Palestinians and given them equal rights,<sup>15</sup> living side by side with them for many decades. Therefore – so the view went – it was not reasonable for Palestinians to see their Syrian brethren suffering from injustice and oppression without any solidarity and sympathy in their desire to obtain their freedom; the freedom that has long been a slogan echoed by the Palestinians since the *Nakba*.

They also recalled the history of the regime's injustice and brutality against the Palestinians, both in general, and with specific regard to Palestinians in Syria. These grievances included Syrian governmental actions in the Lebanese civil war such as that Tel Za'tar massacre in 1976 and the siege of the Palestinian camps in Lebanon. They also included the programme of arrests that was carried out by the regime after its conflict with Yasser

Arafat in 1983. Another key memory was of the special "Palestinian branch" of the security forces, as well as the regime's attempts to split the Palestinian factions, as happened within the Fatah movement in 1983. Indeed, there was a long list of painful incidents still deeply rooted in the minds of many Palestinians, which caused them to welcome the prospective fall of the regime.

On the other hand, there were Palestinian refugees who supported the regime. They believed in the regime's narrative that there was a global conspiracy against Syria and that they had proof to justify this position. For example, the countries which demanded that Bashar Al-Assad should step down were the same countries that had historically been hostile to the Palestinian cause, or had never supported it, whether they were Arab countries, such as the Gulf states, or international powers, such as the United States and the members of the European Union. They believed that the aim of the war was to weaken the axis of resistance and to overthrow the Syrian regime, which had been supporting the Palestinian cause over the past decades and had been embracing the rebel factions. They also recalled past history to justify their points of view, invoking, for example, the 1973 October War, and the support they provided to repel the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, during which hundreds of Syrian soldiers were killed.

This point of view is neatly encapsulated by Palestinian researcher Muhammad Abu Nahal: "If the Syrian regime falls, the Palestinians will be lost as a people (not as a leadership) and their strategic allies in the region and the world will also be lost. They will also lose the political, military and moral support that they have been provided with from regional and international allies."<sup>16</sup>

These Palestinians also believed – in a reformulation of the argument put forward by anti-regime Palestinians – that they owed the Syrian *regime* their support because of the laws which put them on a par with their Syrian brethren. The laws were issued before the Arab Baath Socialist Party came to power (thus

before Assad took power) but remained under the new government. The fact that these decrees were still in force without any changes was a source of gratitude for Palestinians. They compared their situation with the situation of Palestinian refugees in neighboring countries, where they lived under difficult conditions.<sup>17</sup> It is also worth noting that Palestinians who took this position were generally taking a stance that was in line with the official one adopted by the key Palestinian factions, who believed that the alternative to the regime was linked to external agendas hostile to their cause. Additionally, there is no doubt that a few Palestinians based their position on personal interests, some seeking to preserve privileges granted by the regime, while others derived benefits from the existence of the regime.

### **Provocations**

While ideological convictions and contingent factors on their own might well have ultimately driven Palestinians to mobilise, this process was almost certainly hastened in some cases by provocative actions by the regime (and, in some instances, by Syrian rebels). At least in the view of Palestinians with pre-existing rebel sympathies, there was a clear policy by the regime from early on to try to inflame tensions between Palestinians and (pro-regime) Syrians by spreading propaganda that Palestinians were behind the riots which took place in some Syrian cities, such as Daraa and Latakia. The Syrian newspaper, *Al-Watan*, which is close to the regime, made an accusation in its issue dated 22 March 2011 that some of the Palestinian refugees were behind what was going on in Daraa. Later on, Buthaina Shaaban, political and media adviser to the Syrian president, accused a group of Palestinians in the Alramel camp of being behind the "sedition" in Latakia when, on 27 March 2011, she claimed that "some of the Palestinian brothers attacked and damaged the shops in Latakia city and initiated sedition in the community".<sup>18</sup>

Later on, this accusation moved from mere media hype to reality when some Palestinian camps witnessed incidents which were indeed a turning point, bringing about the realization that

the regime was using violence against peaceful demonstrations. The most important incident, which was known as "the second return march", or "Al-Kalesa events", on 6 June 2011, occurred when members of the regime loyalist Popular Front General Command fired on the funeral of the martyrs of the second "return march", leading to a number of deaths and dozens of injuries among the young mourners.

A second major turning-point for the Palestinians, in Syria in general and the camps in particular, came in mid-August 2011, when the Syrian army bombed Alramel camp which is located on the city's outskirts. About five thousand Palestinians fled the camp under fire in the course of a major crackdown on protestors in Latakiya."<sup>19</sup>

The assassination of a number of officers of the Palestine Liberation Army, because they refused to involve the Liberation Army in the fighting, was new proof in confirming to some Palestinians that the regime was trying to drag them into the furnace of the conflict.<sup>20</sup>

From the point of view of the party which was against the regime, the demonstrations which took place in most Syrian cities were peaceful for the first few months<sup>21</sup>, as President Bashar al-Assad had said, and therefore the problem lay in the regime's unwillingness to reform and their using of the security forces to abort popular mobilization.

### **Daraa and Neirab: A View from the Camps**

Having outlined the general factors behind Palestinian mobilization in the Syrian conflict, I will now seek to explore the question in more depth by focusing on the specific cases of two Palestinian refugee camps in Syria: Daraa and Neirab. These cases present an interesting contrast because of the opposite sides they ended up on: broadly speaking, Daraa adopted a strongly anti-regime position, whereas Neirab did not.

Daraa refugee camp was originally founded in 1950. A new camp was created immediately next to the first one in 1967 to accommodate new refugees from the Six Days' War,

including Syrians displaced from the Golan Heights. The camp is located immediately to the east of the city of Daraa and, as is usual with Palestinian refugee camps in Syria, can now effectively be considered an integral part of the Daraa metropolitan area, with the population consisting of a mixture between the original Palestinian inhabitants and some with Syrian national status. The total population of the camp is 13,000.<sup>22</sup>

Neirab camp, with a population of 19,000,<sup>23</sup> is located in a mostly rural area 16 kilometers to the east of Aleppo, meaning that it constitutes what is in effect an independent township. It was founded between 1948 and 1950, meaning that most of its inhabitants are Palestinian refugees from this period.

Historical and geographical factors mean that, immediately prior to the outbreak of the Syrian conflict, the two camps differed somewhat in terms of the make-up of their respective populations. The camps also differed somewhat from a socio-economic point of view. Daraa camp – like the city in which it is located – depended largely on the agricultural industry. Neirab's economy was more dependent on education and, ultimately, on UNRWA institutions.

From a political point of view however, there is little reason to believe that the two camps were unlike. In common with most Palestinian refugee camps immediately prior to the outbreak of hostilities, political affiliations approximated to those in Palestine itself with a roughly equal balance between supporters of Hamas and of Fatah. Despite the existence of several groups closely aligned with the Syrian regime, such as Saiqa, Fatah al-Intifada and the PFLP-GC, these groups have enjoyed only limited popular allegiance in Syria as elsewhere.

In what follows I present a necessarily simplified account of how overall sentiment in these places changed over the course of the war. Naturally, opinion in neither camp was monolithic during the period with which I am concerned. Nevertheless, it is meaningful to speak of a general shift in the prevailing opinions in both cases. As I argue, these attitudes were primarily determined by the question of which side caused damage to the camp

and its inhabitants (such as destruction, killings, arrests, siege, shelling). Here, the geographical location of the camp and its importance to the conflicting parties played the most significant role in the course of events and facts.

Given that the Syrian civil war originally escalated from the protests that began in Daraa in March 2011, it is unsurprising that Daraa refugee camp was embroiled in the conflict from its outset. In the early months, inhabitants of the camp assisted Syrian demonstrators by providing humanitarian relief. Soon, the camp was also serving as a refuge for those wanted by regime forces. As an article in *Al-Araby* put it, this “made the camp a target, especially as the camp is located between Daraa al-Mahatta and the Syrian displaced camp, making it a mandatory channel for the regime's forces to suppress protesters in the displaced camp or in the area around the dam”.<sup>24</sup> As early as 23 March, Daraa camp had produced its first Palestinian martyr, Wissam Amin al-Ghoul, who was killed by Syrian security forces after he tried to transfer two injured Syrians to the camp’s hospital.<sup>25</sup>

A direct consequence of these acts of solidarity was to place the camp itself directly in the firing line. According to the media activist Ayham al-Said, “Most of the camp's Palestinian refugee inhabitants were displaced as a result of the barbaric shelling of the camp by the Syrian regime”.<sup>26</sup> By June 2017, the number of casualties had reached 370, with the addition of 68 political detainees.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, the Working Group for Palestinian-Syrians confirmed that about 80% of the camp was destroyed. The regime had arrested and killed a significant number of the camp’s inhabitants.<sup>28</sup>

Neirab camp offers a different and contrasting story. The camp is located in close proximity to Neirab Military Airport, to the headquarters of the 80<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the Syrian Army which was charged with defending the air base, and to Aleppo International Airport. It was, therefore, a place of key strategic importance for both regime and opposition forces.

As a consequence of this, the camp experienced significant violence early on in the conflict from opposition forces. On 11 July 2012, a rebel militia kidnapped and executed fourteen members of the Palestinian Liberation Army faction while they were returning from Musayef to Aleppo. This was despite the fact that the Palestinian Liberation Army had not yet adopted a clear position in support of the regime. The situation further escalated in 2013, when opposition militants besieged the camp, blocking access to essential commodities and causing considerable hardship to the inhabitants – especially children.<sup>29</sup> This was in addition to deaths, injuries and destruction of houses and shops caused when the camp was shelled.<sup>30</sup> This hostility has continued. As recently as May 2019, the camp was again shelled by opposition forces who killed ten people, including children and elderly people.

By contrast, the camp saw comparatively little repression from the regime. While a number of the camp's inhabitants were arrested, some of whom were subjected to torture, the regime did not launch indiscriminate violent attacks on the camp of the kind seen in Daraa and other Palestinian camps.

Ultimately, Neirab camp became characterized by an attitude of popular outrage against the opposition factions, which helped to provide a pretext for the regime and its supporters in the camp to form a military force supporting the regime, known as the Jerusalem Brigade.<sup>31</sup> There is some reason to believe that a self-reinforcing dynamic ultimately emerged between Neirab's reputation for regime loyalism and the regime's own politics towards the camp. As one former inhabitant of the camp noted, as the conflict progressed, there was a widely held belief that regime security forces displayed preferential treatment towards inhabitants of the camp on the basis of their presumed loyalty.

To summarise, according to the Palestinian Working Group for Syria, as of 2011, the number of Palestinian refugees who were killed in Daraa camp is 413<sup>32</sup>, most of them by the regime<sup>33</sup>, while the number of Palestinian refugees who were killed in Neirab camp is 183, most of them by armed opposition groups. According to UNRWA statistics, the population of the

Neirab camp is about 19,000, while the population of the Daraa camp is 13,000, meaning that in proportional terms, the regime violence against Daraa was more severe than that of rebel groups against Neirab.

### **Discussion**

As the cases of Daraa and Neirab indicate, Palestinian mobilization in the Syrian civil war was closely bound up with contingent factors and dynamics on the ground. This is not to say that ideological and pre-existing structural variables, such as the five factors outlined earlier, were irrelevant – indeed we can see all of them at play in one way or another in the cases. Demographic overlap was clearly important in helping to account for the rapidity with which the Palestinians of Daraa became entangled in the fate of their neighbours. Geographical proximity was also important – and arguably was even more so in shaping the fate of Neirab. These factors, in turn, opened the camps to provocative attacks from the regime in the case of Daraa, and rebel forces in the case of Neirab, which represented the most immediately proximate cause of their political alignment. It is worth noting that it was apparently not simply repression on its own that was key here, but rather the experience of indiscriminate repression. The two factors that seem to have been least relevant were pre-existing factional loyalty and ideological affiliation, although these were not necessarily entirely irrelevant. As we have seen in the case of Neirab, the fact that Palestinian paramilitary groups that had been allowed to operate in Syria were typically closely linked to the regime seems to have predisposed some Syrian rebel groups towards an early hostile stand against them. This, in turn, was an important factor in tipping the alignment of the camp in favour of the regime. Nevertheless, there is little reason to think that Daraa's ideological and factional make-up at the outset of the Syrian conflict was radically different to that of Neirab.

As civil war scholar Stathis Kalyvas has observed, mobilization in civil wars is often understood as ideologically

motivated and based upon political alignments that preceded it, and largely account for the dynamics of the subsequent violence.<sup>34</sup> In line with other studies examining “micro-level” dynamics of violent conflict,<sup>35</sup> the case of the Palestinians in Syria helps to challenge such assumptions. There is little reason to believe that, at the outset of the Syrian civil war, Daraa and Neirab camps differed to any significant degree in the political sympathies and affiliations of their inhabitants. Nonetheless, over the course of the war, they ended up – as we have seen – taking diametrically opposed positions. Despite the many potential ideological and social factors that could have accounted for Palestinian partisanship in the conflict, it appears that both contingent and arbitrary events are largely accountable for the actual positions they ultimately adopted.

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<sup>1</sup>UNRWA in Figures – January 2011, UNRWA, online, accessed 28/6/2019 Available online at: <https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/2011092751539.pdf>. This figure refers only to officially registered refugees. Since not all Palestinians in Syria are officially registered the actual figure may well be higher.

<sup>2</sup> See: e.g. Strindberg, A. “The Damascus Based Alliance of Palestinian Forces”, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 29:3, Spring 2000, pp. 60-76.

<sup>3</sup>See: e.g. Hinnebusch, R. *Syria: Revolution from Above*, London: Routledge, 2001 - especially chapter 7: “Syrian Foreign Policy”.

<sup>4</sup>Gabiam, N. *The Politics of Suffering: Syria’s Palestinian Refugees*, Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Brand, L. “Palestinians in Syria: The Politics of Integration”, *Middle East Journal*, 42: 4, Autumn 1988, pp. 621-637.

<sup>6</sup> Hanafi, S. “Governing the Palestinian Refugee Camps in Lebanon and Syria: The Cases of Nahr el-Bared and Yarmouk camps”, in S. Hanafi and A. Knudsen, eds. *Palestinian Refugees: Identity, Space and Place in the Levant*. London and New York: Routledge, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Fakhruddin, Y. and Y. Zidane, *Palestinian Refugees in the Syrian Tribulation: Research Papers, Statistics, Documents*. Paris: Center for Democratic Republic Studies, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Fakhruddin and Zidane, op. cit. p. 36.

<sup>9</sup>For further details, see: Ouf M. “Palestinian militias are fighting alongside Assad in Syria”, *Sasa Post*, 11/03/2018, online, Accessed 15-3-2019. <https://www.sasapost.com/palestinian-militias-fighting-with-syrian-regime/>.

<sup>10</sup> Fakhruddin and Zidane, op. cit. p. 38

<sup>11</sup> Abu Hashem. A, “Consequences of the Syrian Revolution for the Palestinians in Syria: The Case of Yarmouk Camp: Aspects of Intervention and Interaction”, *Palestinian Affairs [Shu’un Filistiniyya]*, vol. 252, 2013, p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> Fakhruddin and Zidane, op. cit. p. 41

<sup>13</sup> Baytar, N. *The Palestinians in Syria, between Revolution and Uncertainty*. Centre for Palestinian Studies, 2012, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Badwan, A. “The reality of Palestinian refugees in Syria examined”. *Haq al-Awda*, no. 61, n.d.

<sup>15</sup> All decrees and decisions relating to the granting the rights to Palestinians on equal footing with the Syrians were issued before Hafez

al-Assad came to power. Law No. 260 was passed unanimously by the Syrian Parliament and signed by the President Shukri al-Quwatli on 10 July 1956. For further details, see:

- Badwan, A. "The Current Situation of Palestinians in Syria: An Eye-Witness Testimony", *Al Majdal*, no. 57, Summer 2015, p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Muhammad Abu Nahal, O. "The Positions of the Palestinian Authority and Hamas towards the Syrian Crisis and its implications for the future of the Palestinian Cause", research paper presented to the conference on Palestinian National Security, 2-3 November, 2016. p. 33.

<sup>17</sup> In 1964, by Ministerial Decree No. 17561, the Lebanese Ministry of Labor prohibited Palestinians from working in about seventy categories of jobs. For further details, see: "Palestinian refugees suffer in Lebanon". Washington Institute, Autumn 2012, online, accessed 28/6/2019.

<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/ar/policy-analysis/view/palestinian-refugees-languish-in-lebanon>,

<sup>18</sup> al-Tibi, A. "Writing in response to the accusations of Bouthaina Shaaban: How long will the Palestinians remain a scapegoat the failures of the regimes?", *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 29/3/2011, online.

<http://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=614791&is-sueno=11809#.WSymqZLyvIU>,

<sup>19</sup> Bitar, N. "Yarmuk Refugee Camp and the Syrian Uprising: A View from Within", *Institute for Palestine Studies*, Vol. 43, 2013, p. 69.

<sup>20</sup> Colonel Reda al-Khadra and Colonel Abdul Nasser al-Maqari and his driver were assassinated in late February 2012. Colonel Ahmed Saleh al-Hassan was assassinated in late June of the same year, following the targeting of officers of the Palestine Liberation Army. For further details, see: Zaghmout, M. "The situation of Palestinian refugees in Syria after the revolution" *Action Group for Palestinians of Syria*, 11/29/2016, online. <http://www.actionpal.org.uk/ar/post/6261>.

<sup>21</sup> Bashar Al-Assad, The revolution was peaceful for six months, Syria stream dignity Channel, 6/2/2016, online, accessed 14/4/2020.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VyZNCU0B2oc>

<sup>22</sup> UNRWA, "Where we work", online, accessed 25/5/2019.

<https://www.unrwa.org/ar/where-we-work>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ali, A. “Daraa is the camp of the revolution” *Al Arabi*. 13/8/2016, online, accessed 14/4/2020.

<https://www.alaraby.co.uk/society/2016/8/12/%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%B9%D8%A7-%D9%85%D8%AE%D9%8A%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AB%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B0-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%87%D8%A7>.

<sup>25</sup> Fakhruddin and Zidane, op. cit, p. 36.

<sup>26</sup> Ahmad. E. Daraa Refugee Camp, insistence to stay and withstand despite the devastation *alkhaleeonline.*, 17/7/2016, online, accessed 14/4/2020.

<https://alkhaleeonline.net/%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D9%85%D8%AE%D9%8A%D9%85-%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%B9%D8%A7-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%A6%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A5%D8%B5%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D9%85%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%B1%D8%BA%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B1>,

<sup>27</sup> Zaghmout. M, op. cit.

<sup>28</sup> Hamoud, Tarek, and Ibrahim Al-Ali, eds., *Palestinians of Syria and the Closed Doors*, The Palestinian Return Centre & Action Group for Palestinians of Syria, 2017; UNRWA, *The biannual field report on the situation of Palestinian refugees during the period between July and December 2016*, UNRWA, 2016, p. 48.

<sup>29</sup> “Free army tightens siege on Neirab refugee camp”, *Al Fajr TV*, 6/4/2013, online, accessed 25/5/2019. <http://alfajertv.com/news/64918.html>

<sup>30</sup> For further details, see Hamoud, T., and I. Al-Ali, eds., *Palestinians of Syria and the Closed Doors*, op. cit. pp. 46-48.

<sup>31</sup> It was formed in 2013. In addition to the Palestinian fighters, it has in its ranks many of the Syrian fighters.

<sup>32</sup> Palestinian Working Group for Syria Website , Statistics, accessed 14/4/2020, <http://www.actionpal.org.uk/en/geographical-by-incident/3/daraa>.

<sup>33</sup> Palestinian Working Group for Syria Website , Statistics, accessed 14/4/2020, <http://www.actionpal.org.uk/en/geographical-by-incident/3/daraa>.

<sup>34</sup> See: Kalyvas, S. *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

<sup>35</sup> For an overview, see: Kalyvas, S. “Micro-Level Studies of Violence in Civil War: Refining and Extending the Control-Collaboration Model”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 24:4, 2003, pp. 658-668.

### 3

#### **No Temple in Palmyra!** *Opposing the Reconstruction of the Temple of Bel*

ANDREAS SCHMIDT-COLINET<sup>1</sup>

##### **Background**

In 2015, the Temple of Bel in Palmyra, Syria was intentionally destroyed with explosives by the so-called Islamic State (ISIL, Daesh). (Fig. 1-3).<sup>2</sup> Other ancient buildings in this oasis city were also destroyed. The museum was bombed through its roof, seriously compromising its structural integrity, and many artefacts were purposely smashed. Even the catalogue of the museum's inventory was destroyed in the civil war. A new survey will have to be taken and a completely new catalogue composed. This alone will require years of work. Other serious consequences of the war were the lootings, especially in the ancient tombs, and the increased illegal export of artefacts, especially from Palmyra.

The world's reaction to all these events varied widely. First, mention must be made of the "First Aide" admirably provided by Polish archaeologists: immediately after the destruction of the monumental lion sculpture standing in front of the museum, they went to Palmyra and documented the damage and took steps towards a new restoration.

In general, the international press, radio, and television reports raged continuously and with approximate accuracy over the latest levels of destruction. The Mayor of London at that time, Boris Johnson, erected the central arch of Palmyra in a reproduction of reduced proportions at Trafalgar Square<sup>3</sup> as a "warning" (Fig. 4). The Russian National Symphony Orchestra staged a Peace Concert in the Palmyra Theatre<sup>4</sup> for the benefit of the Russian and Syrian soldiers at which a video of President Vladimir Putin thanking *his* soldiers for the liberation of

Palmyra and “rescue of ancient culture”,<sup>5</sup> something which “the West was not capable of doing” was screened. In both cases, the fate of Palmyra was exploited politically by means of press and media exposure with the goal of projecting a political or even moral self-image to the public, rather than actually valuing an ancient cultural heritage.

More respectable reactions could be observed in the domains of art and culture. Films were made such as the stirring declaration of love by Hans Puttnies.<sup>6</sup> Exhibitions with catalogues were organized at which photos, and models made of cork and plastic, as well as 3D animations were placed next to original ancient artefacts (Fig. 5-6). Lecture series and workshops were held repeatedly to discuss “the future of Palmyra”. The world of scientific specialists met repeatedly in a number of conferences and expressed itself in a number of publications.

Political institutions and organisations, both governmental and private, addressed the need for the protection of culture. Statements, reports, ethical charters and red lists appeared. National and international aid and reconstruction programs were initiated to prepare for what could be done once hostilities ceased. For example, mention can be made here of the efforts undertaken by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD),<sup>7</sup> and the German Archaeological Institute (DAI);<sup>8</sup> both of which are supported financially by the German Foreign Ministry. Much of this activity can be interpreted also as a direct expression of the frustration, horror and dismay of politicians and the scientific and cultural community. That this was a kind of *kulturbeflissene Trotzaktionen*, an act of cultural defiance,<sup>9</sup> does not necessarily diminish its value. Yet one could sometimes gain the impression that profiling and self-representation of individuals or institutions might have been a greater motivator than the goals expressed.

### **The Debate on Reconstruction**

Immediately following the destruction of the Temple of Bel, a heated debate arose concerning its reconstruction. In this controversy the proposals were wide-ranging. Some called for a life-sized reconstruction of the temple at its original site with the aid of modern 3D-printing technology,<sup>10</sup> and others joined the “Rebuild the Temple!” campaign.<sup>11</sup> There was also a demand for a *kämpferische Reproduktion*, Combative Reproduction.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, others requested “No *Berliner Schloss* in Palmyra!”,<sup>13</sup> or “A reconstruction is out of the question”,<sup>14</sup> or even “We should do absolutely nothing!”.<sup>15</sup>

It is the purpose of this article to argue that the complex debate about a reconstruction of the Temple should be determined by the building *itself*, by its history, its historical background and context as well as by its cultural significance through scientific and scholarly research.

### **The Historical Significance of Palmyra**

In the globalised world of the Roman Empire, Palmyra played an essential role as an exchange point for goods and cultures of the East and West. This pivotal role was a consequence of its geographical and geo-politically privileged position between the ports of the Mediterranean and the trade routes to Asia (Fig. 7). The many samples of Chinese silk found in the tombs of Palmyra (Fig. 8)<sup>16</sup> are the very products which gave the “Silk Road” its name. To pursue this long-distance trade, the Palmyrenes used not only the land routes but also the sea routes via the Euphrates and the Gulf which extended their trade to India. The means of transport were not only the dromedary camel caravans but also sea-going ships, both of which are documented by inscriptions and visual representations (Figs. 10-11). The wealth of the city, based on trade between Rome on the one hand and China and India on the other, is evidenced not only in the written sources, but also in the archaeological evidence of the prosperous and imposing landscape of ruins: a large cityscape with dwellings, temples, public buildings, monuments and public spaces often

connected by colonnaded avenues, and last but not least an extensive and impressive necropolis.

### **The Temple of Bel**

The Temple of Bel is possibly the prime example demonstrating the pivotal role of Palmyra in the global exchange between East and West.<sup>17</sup> It is precisely this building that presents itself as a monument to both Eastern and Western traditions. And it is here that these two traditions are combined to become something quite unique. This fact cannot be emphasised enough when debating the reconstruction of the Temple.

The Temple was erected in the first century AD. Its layout follows the Greek scheme of a peripteral temple with a double wide portico (*pseudo-dipteros*) (Fig. 12). Furthermore, the temple is, not only in its plan but also in its size, an exact copy of a very particular Greek temple, the Temple of Artemis at Magnesia on the Maeander in Ionia on the west coast of Asia Minor (Fig.13).<sup>18</sup> The latter was erected around 200 BC by the famous architect Hermogenes, that is, some three hundred years before the Temple of Bel. The copy in Palmyra goes so far as to place the axis of the door at exactly the same position where in the temple in Magnesia the partition separates the porch in front (*pronaos*) from the interior hall (*cella*). Furthermore, details of the architectural decoration, such as the Ionian half-column capitals on the exterior walls of the main hall (Fig. 14), are exact copies of those on the temple at Magnesia (Fig. 15). Thus, both the layout and the architectural decoration of the Temple of Bel are drawn directly from this particular Greek-Hellenistic model. Additionally, a Greek inscription gives us a Greek name of an (or, *the*) architect of the Bel Temple: *Alexandros architekton tou Belou*, Alexander, Architect of Bel.

Yet, there is an important difference between the two temples. While the Temple in Magnesia has its entrance on the narrow side of the building, the Temple of Bel has its entrance on its long side. This difference brings the structure into conformity with ancient eastern practice of temple construction.

According to this ancient eastern tradition the visitor to the temple had to enter through the long side of the temple from where the representation of the deity was not immediately visible ahead. Rather, to approach the ritual cultic niches it was necessary to turn at a right angle, either to the right or to the left.

With this oriental detail, the Greek architecture has become something quite different. This variance becomes even more visible when looking at the upper structure of the Temple of Bel. From its narrow side, the building looks like a Greco-Roman temple with a facade of eight columns and a triangular pediment over them (Fig. 16), similar to the Mars-Ultor Temple built at about the same time by Emperor Augustus on his Forum in Rome (Fig. 17).<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, seen from its long side, i.e. the entrance side of the temple, the building has – unlike anything Roman – a flat roof accessible by stairway towers. This conforms again to ancient eastern tradition (Fig. 18). In particular, the stepped battlements crowning the top of the building are consistent with ancient eastern sacred architecture. This architectural motif was long established and common to religious buildings also in Palmyra, for example on the old Allat Temple (Fig. 19) which was already present before the Temple of Bel.<sup>20</sup>

All of these facts indicate that the Temple of Bel is a building which is at once influenced by both East and West. Nonetheless, or perhaps precisely therefore, it was considered a sacred building by people of varying cultural backgrounds; on the one hand, by those with a native Middle Eastern religious background, while at the same time by those of the Greco-Roman tradition. To grasp what this phenomenon indicates it might be useful to imagine what such a religious building could look like in today's Europe. For example, one could imagine St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna with a minaret instead of its Gothic bell tower (Fig. 20). The symbiosis of different traditions as demonstrated in the architecture is especially noticeable also in the frieze of the Temple (Fig. 21). While the motif and the type of vine scrolls come clearly from the repertoire of Roman urban

architecture, the execution of this motif can be attributed to a local mason because the grapes have been given the shape of dates.

The ambiguity of the building's construction and in particular of its roof was acknowledged by its contemporaries well into late antiquity. In the year 390 AD, for example, Libanios described the building in detail when writing a tract lobbying the Christian Emperor Theodosius for the preservation of pagan temples. The tract was entitled *Pro templis* and was intended to rescue antique pagan temples such as the Temple of Bel from destruction. It ends with the words: "And this excellent, gigantic temple with its wonderful roof and the many bronze statues which are protected from sunlight in the dark interior is in danger."<sup>21</sup>

Later, during the sixth and seventh centuries AD, the building was actually used as a Christian church. Evidence for this was left in the wall paintings on the west wall of the interior cella (Fig. 22). There, a seated Madonna is depicted with the Christ child (with a nimbus) on her lap. Behind and above her an angel with spread red wings can be recognised. To the right and to the left of this ensemble are bearded male figures in white robes, also with halos. These are most likely meant to depict Apostles.<sup>22</sup>

Following the capture of Palmyra by the Muslim Arabs in 634 AD, and from the eighth century onwards, the inhabitants of Palmyra increasingly sought refuge behind the protecting walls surrounding the sanctuary. These were strengthened in the course of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, transforming the sanctuary into a kind of fortress. Since that time, the temple/church was being used as a mosque. A semi-circular prayer niche (*mihrab*) was cut into the interior of the south wall of the cella, indicating the direction of Mecca, towards which prayer was to be oriented. Arabic inscriptions provide evidence of several restorations of the mosque in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The building was used as a mosque by the local inhabitants until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that is, for nearly a thousand years.

### Palmyra in the World View of Europe

The first records indicating that European travellers found interest in Palmyra appear beginning in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. This was linked to their curiosity for the fabulous ruined city of the desert with its enormous Sun Temple. The first known depiction of Palmyra is presented in the oil painting completed in 1693 and attributed to Gerarde Hofstede. This painting is preserved today in the Allard Pierson Museum in Amsterdam (Fig. 23).<sup>23</sup> The monumental painting, measuring more than four meters in width and nearly 90 cm in height, gives a panorama where the shining white Temple on the left dominates an otherwise sand-coloured canvas of ruins. The painting was made as viewed from the north and was based on sketches provided by visitors to the site. It became the model for all subsequent representations of Palmyra, as in the engraving published by Timothy Lanoy and Aaron Goodyear following their visit to Palmyra in 1695 (Fig. 24). It is of historical interest that they noted on this engraving, “Temple now inhabited”. Following this representation, Johann Fischer von Erlach drafted his educational guidebook, *Entwurf einer Historischen Architectur* (Concept of Historical Architecture) published in 1725. Von Erlach never visited the city. In his fantasy landscape of Palmyra, the city is illuminated by the rays of the sun rising behind the Temple of Bel (Fig. 25).

Then, the Englishmen Robert Wood and James Dawkins visited Palmyra in 1751. They were the first to take measurements of the monuments they studied, publishing their drawings, plans, vistas, and reconstructions in 1753.<sup>24</sup> This publication had an enormous impact in England, as is evidenced in many aristocratic country houses built in this era. For example, the ceiling of the drawing room in Osterley Park House, conceived by Robert Adam about 1765,<sup>25</sup> relies closely on Wood’s drawing of the ceiling of the south niche of the Temple of Bel (Fig. 26-27). It is also interesting to note that it was in the correspondence between the architect and his employer, Francis Child, that the term ‘arabesque’ can be documented for the first time: the house owner requested that the

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architect create an “Arabesque ceiling like in Wood's publication”.<sup>26</sup>

Thirty years after Wood and Dawkins, in May 1785, the French architect and painter Louis-Francois Cassas spent three weeks in Palmyra and finished more than 100 large-scale drawings, plans, depictions, and reconstructions. Cassas's measurements are far more exact than those of Wood and Dawkins. He also was the first to number the still-standing columns on a complete plan of the sanctuary and to distinguish graphically the exactly-measured elements from the reconstructed ones (Fig. 28). Additionally, he added his handwritten notes about the condition of the buildings. One could consider Cassas the first architectural historian in the sense that term is used today. Cassas then worked on his portfolio from Palmyra while residing in Rome. There he exhibited his works and published his monumental, three-volume study in 1798-99 (Fig. 29-30).<sup>27</sup> In Rome at that time, many members of the contemporary social and cultural elite met in the salon of Angelika Kaufmann. It was within this setting that the encounter between the 31-year-old Cassas and the 38-year-old Goethe took place (Fig. 31-32). Goethe was very impressed by the work of Cassas and described it euphorically and in detail in his *Italienische Reise*.<sup>28</sup> These descriptions leave no doubt that the work of Cassas—and with that, Palmyra and the Temple of Bel—had a remarkable influence on the development of German classical literature.

In 1806, Cassas opened his *Galérie d'Architecture de Monsieur Cassas* in Paris. This was Europe's first Museum of Architecture. Visitors could purchase the master's drawings and models of 745 monuments made in cork or terracotta. Among these was also a model of the Temple of Bel. The Austrian Emperor Franz I attempted to purchase the entire collection, which was valued at 200,000 Francs. But the French government, at this time still under Napoleon, refused to allow the transfer and bought up the collection itself for 126,000 Francs, to which it also added a life pension for Cassas. Emperor

Franz did, however, acquire the entire published works of Cassas for the Vienna Hofbibliothek.

In fact, the influence of Palmyra on 19<sup>th</sup> century European poets, novelists, artists, and travellers is present in many works. Examples include the following: Hölderlin made a reference to it in his *Lebensalter* (1803-04): “*Ihr Städte des Euphrats! Ihr Gassen von Palmyra! ...*”. [“You, cities on the Euphrates! You, streets of Palmyra! ...”]; Baudelaire made a reference in his *Fleurs du mal* (1857): “...Mais les bijoux perdus de l'antique Palmyre...” [“...The lost jewels of ancient Palmyra...”]; and the traveller Léon de Laborde published his sketches in 1837 (Fig. 33). Then, in the second half of the century the first photographs of the Temple appeared. Louis Vignes published his in 1864 (Fig. 34),<sup>29</sup> Félix Bonfils published his in 1870 (Fig. 35), as did John Henry Haynes in 1885.<sup>30</sup> Comparing the photographs of Vignes and Bonfils is of special interest because it documents that the first column of the portico to the right of the Temple's entrance must have been removed between 1864 and 1870.

By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Palmyra with its now famous “Sun Temple” became the traveller's and adventurer's ultimate goal. It was also the stage for diplomatic activity. Gertrude Bell noted in her diary in May 1900: “Beyond them [the ruins] is the immense Temple of Bel; the modern town is built inside it and its rows of columns rise out of a mass of mud roofs.” (Fig.36).<sup>31</sup> Between 1927 and 1936, Marguerite (Marga) d'Andurain, the “femme fatale” and “comtesse de Palmyre” resided in her Zenobia Hotel and from there exercised considerable influence on the diplomacy of the Middle East (Fig. 37).<sup>32</sup> Agatha Christie stopped in Palmyra with her archaeologist husband Max Mellowan, noting in her diary: “That, I think, is the charm of Palmyra – its slender creamy beauty rising up fantastically in the middle of hot sand. [...] It isn't – it can't be real.” (Fig. 38).<sup>33</sup>

The scientific investigations of Palmyra and especially of the Temple of Bel continued apace into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At first came the two German expeditions of Otto Puchstein in 1902 and

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Theodor Wiegand in 1918. The latter came under contract to the *Deutsch-Türkisches Denkmalschutzkommando*. This was one of the first interventions in the cause of preservation of antique monuments authorized by the Ottoman government. Both expeditions, of which the results were published only later in 1932,<sup>34</sup> spent only three weeks in Palmyra. The Temple, at that time standing in the centre of an Arab village, was thereby documented (Fig. 39-40). The archives of both expeditions have yet to be fully exploited. Of particular interest is the private photographic archive of Otto Puchstein, only recently discovered and opened for scholarly investigation. These photographs taken in 1902 present the condition of the Temple and permit insights into the life of the villagers living in its vicinity. (Fig. 41-43).<sup>35</sup>

On 7 April 1917, a day after his arrival, Theodor Wiegand wrote to his wife Marie:

*“Tritt man ein in das gewaltige Viereck [des Belheiligtums], muss man sich erst durch ein ganzes Araberdorf durchwinden, das hier vor Beduinen sicher wohnt, um zu dem Tempel zu gelangen. Sein reiches Riesenporttal führt heute zur Moschee über eine große Freitreppe.”* [Trans.: “To enter the enormous rectangle [the Sanctuary of Bel], one has first to find one’s way through an entire Arab village which has settled here as a refuge from bedouin raiders. The enormous and richly adorned entrance [to the Temple] leads today to a mosque by means of a large open staircase].”<sup>36</sup>

In addition to a full plan of the city of Palmyra, the researchers also made measurements and drawings of the extensive Necropolis. We are also grateful to Wiegand and his team for the only documentation of the temple's building as a mosque with its wooden inclusions (Fig. 44-45).

Comprehensive changes came to the Temple after 1929, when the *Service des Antiquités de Syrie et du Liban* of the French Mandatory Government took charge (Fig. 46-49). The French had been installed as the mandatory power of the new states of Syria and Lebanon by the League of Nations after the

collapse of the Ottoman Empire following World War I. In Palmyra, the major players were the archaeologist Henri Seyrig, the architectural historian Robert Amy, and the architect Michel Ecochard.<sup>37</sup> Their goal was to restore the Temple of Bel to its ancient condition. This involved a partial structural consolidation and restoration, but also the clearance of subsequent structures so that visibility and access for scientists, scholars and the public at large could be facilitated. Additionally, a complete and detailed survey of the Temple was made. These goals were completed between 1929 and 1931 during which time the mud brick structures of the local inhabitants within the precincts of the Temple were demolished, according to the protagonists, the entire Temple precinct was “cleared” and those who lived within and around the Temple's precinct were relocated to dwellings in a newly-built village. The medieval and/or modern structures built inside the Temple were also removed to restore “its original form”. All this, the resurrection of the ancient Temple of Bel in its pure form, the removal of the temple's historical surroundings, and the termination of its utility as a living cultural center for the local population, was reconciled with the goal of making it into a solitary and marvellous ruin.

All this occurred in tune with contemporary western European aesthetics, and with scholarly and scientific values of the time which held that ancient buildings were superior to those of the medieval period; isolated monumental structures were preferred to those in historical context; sacred buildings were preferred to those of ‘profane’ significance, and certainly, to those of habitation. Furthermore, this task was considered a project of national (in this case, French) prestige.

Other European nations pursued the same goals. A similar prestige project, also oriented on contemporary Western aesthetic values, had been undertaken by Germans already in the 1880s, and at that time, without a doubt, in competition with the French. This was the recovery of the Temple of Didyma on the west coast of Asia Minor being led by Theodor Wiegand. Also,

in this case, an entire village was evacuated and its houses demolished in order to investigate the ancient temple and to render it accessible. Wiegand wrote to his wife Marie on 8 March 1887: “*Das halbe Dorf muss demontiert werden. ... die Blöcke sind so gewaltig, dass sich die Franzosen mit Pulversprengungen (!) geholfen haben, da sie die nötigen Hebemaschinen nicht bei sich hatten.*” [Trans.: “Half the village had to be demolished. ... the blocks are so massive that the French assisted with explosives (!) because they hadn't the necessary cranes available.”]<sup>38</sup>

Since that time, our awareness has certainly changed on these issues. We are far more critical of radical measures with regard to historically-integrated buildings. That this consciousness is variable is a proof of how the approach to ‘cultural heritage’ can alter quite rapidly.

In the case of the Temple of Bel it is clear that the French architects achieved their goals of laying free the Temple and rendering it accessible for scholars and the general public. Soon the first ‘tourists’ arrived. Notably, we have the photo of Horatio Gates Spafford showing members of the American community settled in Beirut posing in their bathing suits in front of the Temple of Bel (Fig. 50).

In 1980, the Temple stood in the centre of a large open courtyard and was designated a “World Cultural Heritage” site by UNESCO. Also, it was to serve as the venue for an annual Palmyra Festival. As for the local population, the Temple was a symbol of identity mostly in its function as an object of tourism. Beginning in the 1980s, as I have personally seen, tourism boomed so spectacularly that cruise-ship passengers were transported by tour bus to Palmyra early in the morning from the port of Latakia on the Syrian coast. They visited the ruins of Palmyra in the heat of the day, participated in the obligatory ‘tea break’ on the terrace of the Hotel Zenobia, and, as the sun set, were transported back to their ship in time to enjoy the Captain's Dinner on board.

One can legitimately ask if the henchmen of the so-called Islamic State would have found the Temple of Bel so objectionable if it had been left integrated in its historically-developed environment. But, in the form the Temple was exposed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, for the members of Daesh it had become a symbol of the hated ‘Western’ culture. What if it had not been restored to its ancient beauty, if it had not been presented in isolation but left in the protection of the dwellings of a surrounding native population who had for nearly a millennium used it as a mosque? From this perspective one can see the Temple's destruction in 2015 as a natural progression in a historical process beginning with the secular Enlightenment in Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. At the time of its destruction, the Temple had already had four lives: it had first been a temple, then a church, then a mosque. Then, in its fourth life it continued as a temple, but it was now an icon of European interest and attraction. Tourists pursuing cultural enlightenment of what they considered their own, admittedly shared, world heritage pursued such icons globally. We conclude that for 2000 years the Temple had served as a centre of cult: pagan, Christian, Islamic, and finally touristic.

### **A New Life for the Temple**

With its destruction, the building has begun its fifth life (Fig. 3). What should this look like? Can we set some reasonable parameters and directives for this phase? The following seem essential:

First, it is clear that the area must be secured. This would involve the removal of all military installations from the entire area of the ancient ruins, including the Russian camp at the northern Necropolis (Fig. 53), and the removal of any explosives and battle detritus. Secondly, the destruction itself must be properly documented. All remaining elements must be surveyed *in situ* using all the techniques at scientists’ disposal. This will take years despite the progress in technology. Thirdly, new excavations may now be possible. Researchers may be able to find new evidence as a result of the disturbance of the site. What, for

example, preceded the Temple of Bel on this site? We already have some evidence of prior occupation.

Indeed, one could see the temple's destruction as an opportunity. It is known from earlier excavations and some architectural elements (Fig. 54-55) that the Temple had predecessors in the third/second century BC (Fig. 56).<sup>39</sup> Additionally, ceramics indicate that the area was already settled in the second millennium BC. Future excavations and investigations must be pursued in close collaboration with the Syrian Directorate of Antiquities and the local population. A useful model of the appropriate collaborative guidelines is provided by the international archaeological projects at Jerash in the Kingdom of Jordan between 1981 and 1988.<sup>40</sup>

And finally, should the Temple's fifth life include its reconstruction? If so, then so many questions are appropriate: Which of the previous four lives of the Temple should be reconstructed: the shrine to Bel, the Christian church, the Islamic mosque at the heart of a Syrian-Arab village, or, should it be a 'restored corpse' or an 'artificial ruin' in the era of Western science and tourism? For whom and why should it be reconstructed? Should it be a cultural icon? Should it serve an economic function, as it did in the case of tourism? Or should it be a political prestige project, and/or proof of successful heritage protection?

Would the reconstruction of the Temple as it was in 2015 not be the restoration of a 'ruins romance' which began in Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> century? If so, that would surely be the expression of a Western, backwards-oriented nostalgia as yearned for by a Western-educated, Eurocentric middle class. After all, until 2015 the Temple was mainly a place of Western remembrance. We should be careful not to dictate to others the appropriate view of historical heritage. Many, including the journalist Charlotte Wiedemann<sup>41</sup> and the historian Alexander Demandt,<sup>42</sup> have warned us of the dangers of hubris. As Frank-Walter Steinmeier formulated in his speech while German Foreign Minister on 27 April 2016: "*Wir brauchen klügere*

*Konzepte als das Ausdrucken und Aufstellen von Repliken*” [Trans: “We need wiser concepts than the printing and exhibition of replicas”].<sup>43</sup> Our task should not be motivated by a neo-colonial activism which we or those after us would regret.

Furthermore, all debates concerning a reconstruction of the Temple must clearly be decided also by those who will live there once peace and security is established. We can make suggestions and discuss possibilities and concepts, extending financial and human resources. But, most of all we must express hope in the future, trust, and primarily, patience. We should leave the ruin as it is, accept its loss, and learn that even destroyed culture is a historical document. Even a purposely-destroyed ruin has the right to tell its history, like the gnarled form of an ancient oak tree whose story would be lost if it were to be pruned of its deadwood. A destroyed monument carries a symbolic significance and authenticity. It is the means of communicating a phase of history and dealing with it. It is, indeed, also a part of the cultural heritage.

My personal preference would be to build a new world-class UNESCO Visitors Centre on the site. I remember that the representative of UNESCO had already suggested such a centre when speaking at an international congress held in Palmyra in 1992. As a model for such a centre, the Visitors Centre in Bamberg, Germany comes to mind.<sup>44</sup> But others have suggested the Visitors Centre at the Anza-Borrego State Park in California as an appropriate model.<sup>45</sup> There, the environment is featured against the background of the region's original inhabitants. These types of visitors centres provide multi-dimensional encounters for both foreign and native visitors, with forays into the history and ecology of the region as well as in-depth presentations of the heritage site. Placed within the confines of the ancient city of Palmyra, the visitor would have both an on-site experience and the opportunity to learn about the history and culture of Palmyra. The centre would provide access to the latest maps and plans (Fig. 57) texts and pictures, models and 3D-animations (Fig. 5-6) and facilitate dialogue among those

researching there and between them, the local population, and visitors.

### **The People of Tadmur**

The Syrian Arabic name for Palmyra is Tadmur. Though it is a stretch to find comparable dilemmas for the population of Tadmur, there are some examples which provide insight. Dresden was purposely destroyed during World War II. The will to reconstruct its cathedral, the *Frauenkirche*, came not from outside but from the citizens of Dresden. But this took a very long time to emerge. Then between 1989 and 1997 –and with the reunification of Germany– a plan was devised and the funds raised. The actual reconstruction of the cathedral took place from 1997-2005, that is, half a century after its destruction. Between the destruction and the reconstruction two generations of Dresdeners had lived and contributed to the project.

Another example, that of Warsaw, took a completely different course. The citizens of the city joined together to reconstruct immediately following the war. Between 1946 and 1953, the old city was reconstructed with attention to historical detail. But here the choice was made not to reconstruct an isolated monument, but to rebuild the living quarters of the people first.

With that, we return to Palmyra and see that its present-day city, Tadmur, has been destroyed in the civil war (Fig. 58). Its inhabitants have fled if they were not killed in the war or murdered by the insurgents. Those who survived and remained now live in improvised plastic shelters outside their homes which are in ruins. Clearly, their situation must be addressed first. The reconstruction of living facilities and the provision of infrastructure of electricity, water and sanitation must take priority (Fig. 59-60). Dwellings and streets, shops, hospitals and pharmacies, mosques and schools need to be restored or built anew. These can be built with mud brick or with stone as was done both two millennia ago and a century ago when the

population living within the ancient city were re-housed in the new town.

Thus, as Frank-Walter Steinmeier formulated in his abovementioned speech: “*Wir brüten nicht über der Rekonstruktion beschädigter Tempel, während in Syrien Tag für Tag Menschen sterben*” [Trans: “We can hardly brood over reconstructions of damaged temples while people in Syria are dying day to day”]. This statement applies the more especially for Palmyra/Tadmur: As finally, and of particular personal regret and sorrow, it is especially the members of the local population who had worked for and with the foreigners and who were essential in the investigation and restoration of Palmyra as a World Heritage Site who require assistance. These were especially targeted by the terror of ISIL, were branded by them to be “heathens” or “false believers”, and many of them were murdered. It is, therefore, all the more imperative that all activities, projects and financial support be concentrated on the rebuilding of the city of Tadmur, especially in their honour. This responsibility should be carried by all those persons and institutions which acted as quasi-official bodies, including those operating under the rubric of the “World Heritage Site” (for example UNESCO, DAI, the German Foreign Office) and those who exploited Palmyra as a prestige project and symbol of cultural foreign policy. The tens of thousands who fled Tadmur must be returned to their homes, and their city restored. All other activities and projects must be secondary to this.

The Temple of Bel in its original form already some 2000 years ago is an example of, and model for, the successful coexistence and synthesis of different cultures. Throughout its eventful history it survived as a symbol of tolerance. It therefore pleads for a patient and careful interaction with every sort of historical reality.

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<sup>2</sup>All figures appear in Annex 1.

<sup>3</sup>Turner, L., 2016. *Palmyra's Arch Recreated In London*. [BBC News. [online] Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-36070721> [Accessed 21 April 2020].

<sup>4</sup>GmbH, F., 2016. *Nach Vertreibung Des IS: Orchester Spielt In Den Ruinen Von Palmyra*. [online] Available at: <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/nach-vertreibung-des-is-orchester-spielt-in-den-ruinen-von-palmyra-14218718.html> [Accessed 21 April 2020].

<sup>5</sup>Turner, L., 2016. *Palmyra's Arch Recreated In London*. [online] BBC News. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-36070721> [Accessed 21 April 2020].

<sup>6</sup>YouTube. 2017. "Palmyra" - Trailer - Ein Essayfilm Von Hans Puttnies. [online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N8m2Awr-8gY> [Accessed 21 April 2020].

<sup>7</sup>Austauschdienst, D., 2016. *DAAD-Programm „Führungskräfte Für Syrien“ In Der Abschlussphase - DAAD - Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst*. [online] Available at: <https://www2.daad.de/presse/pressemitteilungen/de/62243-daad-programm-fuehrungskraefte-fuer-syrien-in-der-abschlussphase/> [Accessed 21 April 2020].

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<sup>10</sup>E.g. M. Silver, G. Fangi, and A. Denker, *Reviving Palmyra in Multiple Dimensions: Images, Ruins and Cultural Memory* (Whittles Publishing UK, 2018).

<sup>11</sup>H. Parzinger, "Baut die Tempel wieder auf!", Vortrag in Köln 03.03.2016: <https://www.stadt-koeln.de/politik-und->

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<sup>13</sup> R. A. Stucky, "Fouilles suisses du sanctuaire de Belshamîn à Palmyre. Le passé confronté au présent et à l'avenir," *Antike Kunst* 61, 2018, 63-72 Taf. 12-13.

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<sup>15</sup> A. Schmidt-Colinet, "WIR tun da gar nichts! Über die Geschichte, die Zerstörung und den Wiederaufbau von Palmyra", *Wespennest* 123, 2017, 28-33; also <https://www.eurozine.com/wir-tun-da-gar-nichts-uber-die-geschichte-die-zerstörung-und-den-wiederaufbau-von-palmyra/>; English Text: <http://www.eurozine.com/we-should-do-nothing-on-the-history-destruction-and-rebuilding-of-palmyra/>.

<sup>16</sup> A. Schmidt-Colinet, A. Stauffer, and K. al-As'ad, *Die Textilien aus Palmyra. Neue und alte Funde* (Mainz 2000).

<sup>17</sup> H. Seyrig, R. Amy, and E. Will, *Le temple de Bêl à Palmyre* (Paris 1968/1975); M. Hammad, *Bel/Palmyre. Hommage* (Paris 2016).

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<sup>19</sup> J. Ganzert, *Der Mars Ultor-Tempel auf dem Augustusforum in Rom* (Mainz 1996).

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<sup>22</sup> E. Jastrzębowska, "La christianisation de Palmyre: L'exemple du temple de Bel", *Studia Palmyreńskie* 12, 2013, 177-191.

<sup>23</sup> J. Weingarten, "The First Drawings of the Ruins of Ancient Palmyra: Who Drew Them?", *Brewminate*, 8 May 2017:

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<https://brewminate.com/the-first-drawings-of-the-ruins-of-ancient-palmyra-who-drew-them/>.

<sup>24</sup> R. Wood, *The Ruins of Palmyra otherwise Tedmore in the Desert* (London/Paris 1753).

<sup>25</sup> R. Knowles, “Osterly Park – a Robert Adam showpiece, a Regency History guide”, *Regency History*, 2 April 2015: <https://www.regencyhistory.net/2015/04/osterley-park-robert-adam-showpiece.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> L.-Fr. Cassas, *Voyage pittoresque de la Syrie, de la Phénicie, de la Palestine et de la Basse Egypte* (Paris 1998/99); cf. A. Schmidt-Colinet, “Antike Denkmäler in Syrien: Die Stichvorlagen des Louis-François Cassas (1756–1827) im Wallraf-Richartz-Museum in Köln,” *Kölner Jahrbuch* 29, 1996 (1997), 343–548 Fig. 1–358.

<sup>28</sup> Goethe wrote: “An accomplished French architect by the name of Cassas returned from his travels in the East where he had been in Palmyra. He had measured the most important ancient monuments and depicted their ruined and collapsing condition. Some of his drawings are of great precision, insight, and taste, enlivened with a brush and water colours. [...] They are the most immense architectural ideas that I have ever seen, and I doubt that one can do any better [...]. The things of Cassas are extraordinarily beautiful. I have stolen a few ideas from him that I might bring you. [...] This evening, after we saw these beautiful things [of Cassas] so intimately, we went into the gardens of the palatine where we enjoyed our time however we pleased, as if we now could view the vista of the sunset with freshly-opened and enlightened eyes. We had to admit that this painting [by Cassas] was very good to see. If all were drawn and coloured as did Cassas, all would be enchanted. It was clear that this artistic effort could determine what the eye saw little by little, so that we were ever more open to the presence of Nature and for the Beauty presented there.”]

<sup>29</sup> I. D. Rowland, “Breakfast in the Ruins”, *The New York Review*, 19 September 2019: <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2016/09/17/breakfast-in-the-ruins-palmyra-photographs/>.

<sup>30</sup> B. Anderson, and R. G. Ousterhout, *Palmyra 1885. The Wolfe Expedition and the Photographs of John Henry Hynes* (Edinburgh 2016).

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- <sup>31</sup> J. Wallach, *Desert Queen. The Extraordinary Life of Gertrude Bell. Adventurer, Advisor to Kings, Ally of Lawrence of Arabia* (New York 1996/2005) 55.
- <sup>32</sup> B. Mabillard, “Marga d’Andurain, une reine à Palmyre”, *Le temps*, 3 Aug 2015; Ph. Cotebask, “La vie atypique et fascinante de Marga d’Andurain, Aventurière bayonnaise”, *Cotebasque.net*, 30 July 2018: [https://www.cotebasque.net/pays\\_basque/la-vie-atypique-et-fascinante-de-marga-dandurain-laventuriere-bayonnaise/](https://www.cotebasque.net/pays_basque/la-vie-atypique-et-fascinante-de-marga-dandurain-laventuriere-bayonnaise/).
- <sup>33</sup> A. Christie Mallowan, *Come, tell me how you live* (London 1946/1990) 39; A. Flood, “Agatha Christie’s ‘forgotten’ Syrian Memoir gets new Lease of Life”, *The Guardian International*, 20 May 2015: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/may/20/agatha-christie-syrian-memoir-to-be-republished>.
- <sup>34</sup> Th. Wiegand (ed.), *Palmyra. Die Ergebnisse der Expeditionen von 1902 und 1917* (Berlin 1932).
- <sup>35</sup> My thanks go to Lars Petersen who made this archive accessible to me.
- <sup>36</sup> G. Wiegand (ed.), *Halbmond im letzten Viertel. Briefe und Reiseberichte aus der alten Türkei von Theodor Wiegand und Marie Wiegand 1895 bis 1918* (Mainz 1985) 244.
- <sup>37</sup> For the following, see especially C. Durand, Th. Fournet, and P. Piraud-Fournet, “So long, Bel. In memoriam, Palmyra (6 April 32 – 28 August 2015)”, *Les Carnets de l’Ifpo*, 6 November 2015: <http://ifpo.hypotheses.org/7101>.
- <sup>38</sup> Wiegand loc. cit. (above note 36) 24.
- <sup>39</sup> M. al-Maqdissi, and E. Ishaq, “The First Occupation of Palmyra: Soundings in the Sanctuary of Bel and Tell ez-Zor”, in: J. Aruz (ed.), *Palmyra Mirage in the Desert* (New York 2017) 40-55.
- <sup>40</sup> F. Zayadine (ed.), *Jerash archaeological project. I, 1981-1983* (Amman 1986); Institut Français d’Archéologie du Proche-Orient (ed.), *Jérash archaeological project 2: 1984-1988. Fouilles de Jérash: 1984-1988* (Paris 1989).
- <sup>41</sup> Ch. Wiedemann, *Der lange Abschied von der weißen Dominanz. Globalisierung und Migration: Die Zukunft ist nicht weiß* (München 2019); also S. Dinges, “Charlotte Wiedemann. Mit Weißen über Hautfarbe sprechen”, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 22 October 2019:

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<sup>42</sup> A. Demandt, “Das Ende der alten Ordnung”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 21 January 2016;\_

<https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/staat-und-recht/untergang-des-roemischen-reichs-das-ende-der-alten-ordnung-14024912.html>.

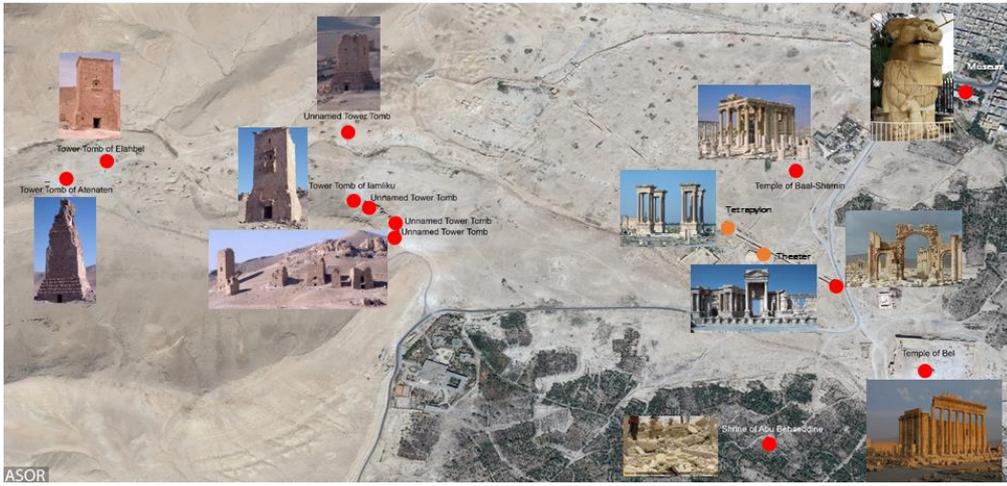
<sup>43</sup> *Rede Von Außenminister Frank-Walter Steinmeier Anlässlich Des Jahrsempfangs Des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts*. Auswärtiges Amt. [online] Available at:

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<sup>44</sup> Welterbe.bamberg.de. 2020. *Das Besucherzentrum Des Welterbe Bamberg*. [online] Available at: <https://welterbe.bamberg.de/de/besucherzentrum> [Accessed 21 April 2020].

<sup>45</sup> Desertusa.com. 2020. *Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, Visitor Center - Desertusa*. [online] Available at: [https://www.desertusa.com/anza\\_borrego/anza\\_borrego\\_facilities.html](https://www.desertusa.com/anza_borrego/anza_borrego_facilities.html) [Accessed 21 April 2020].

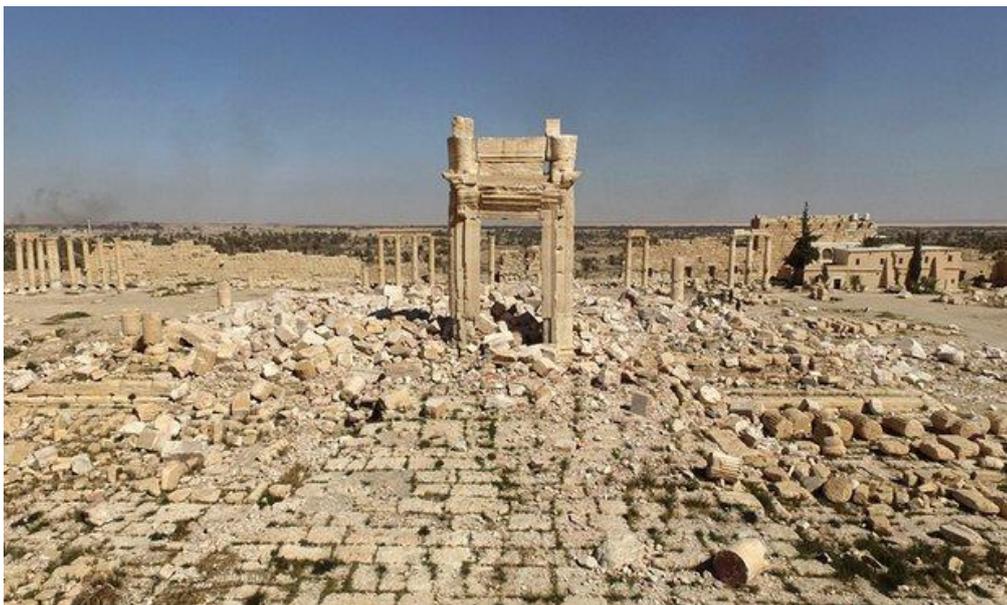




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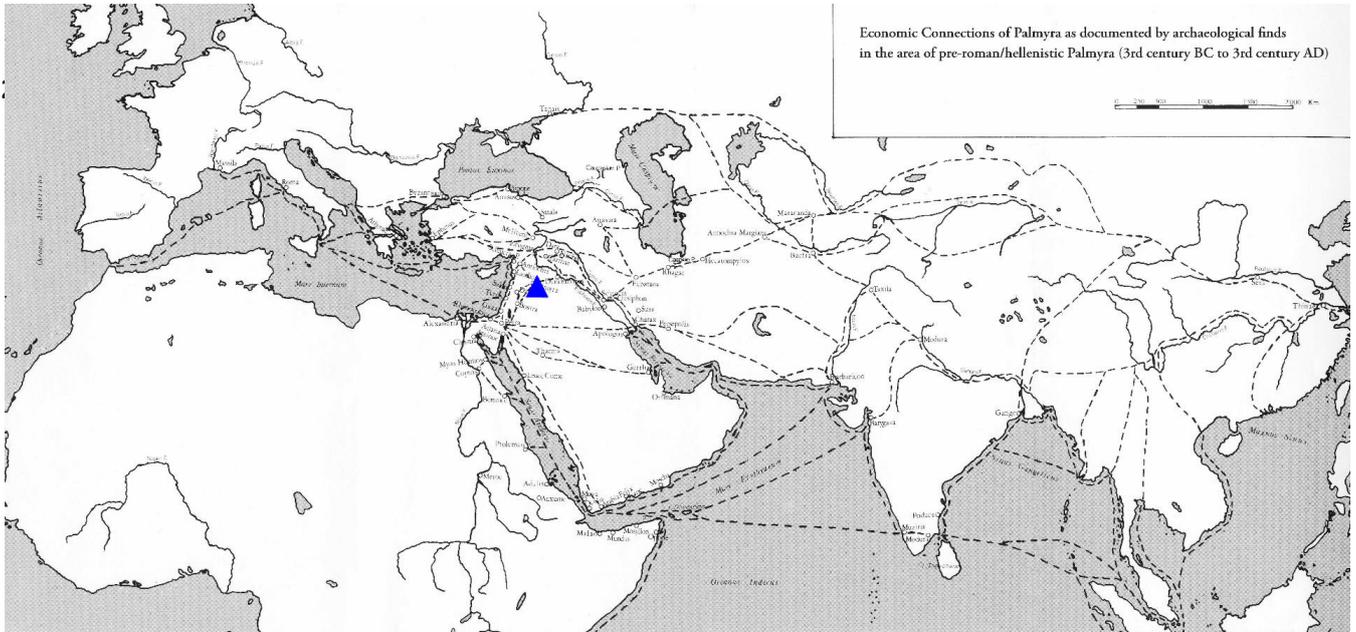
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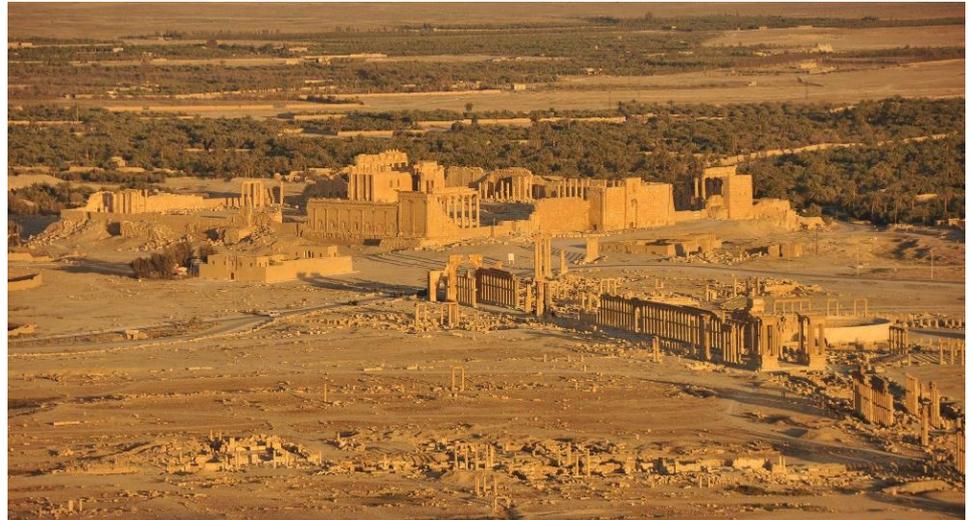
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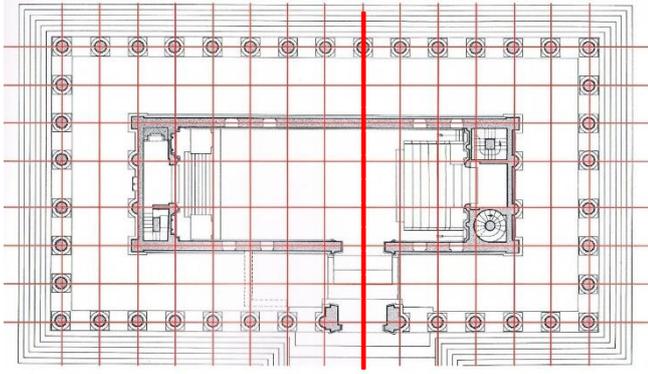
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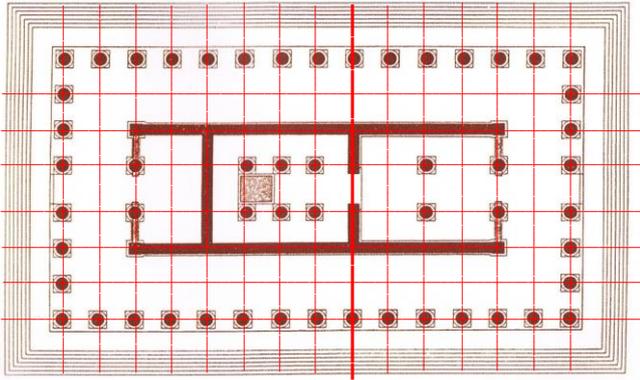
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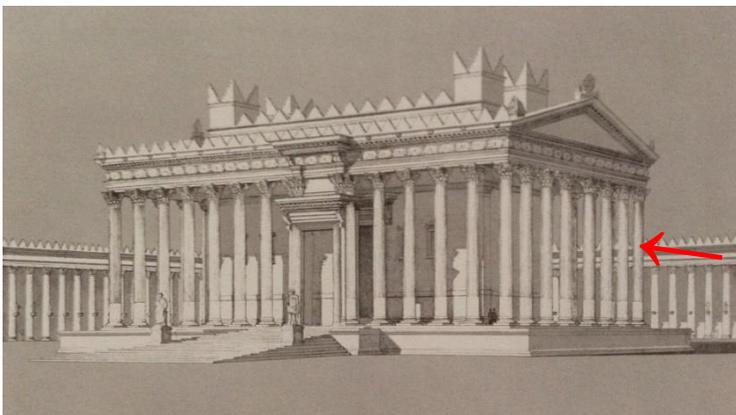
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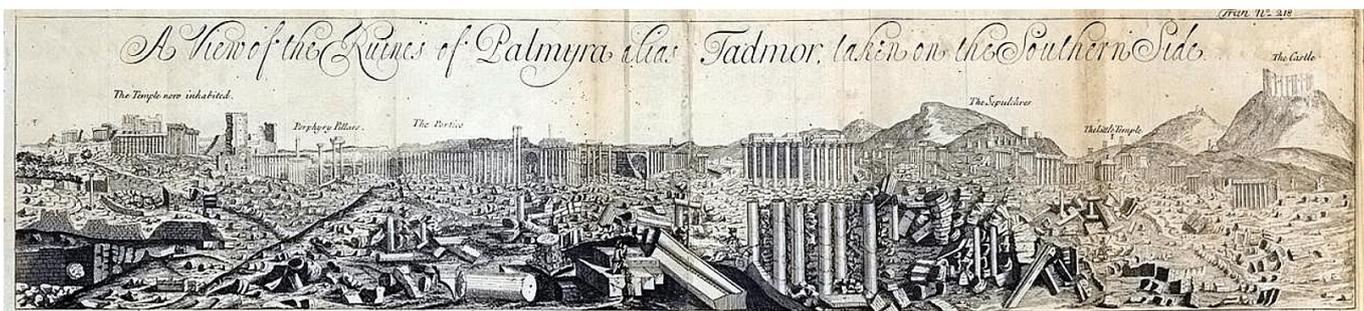
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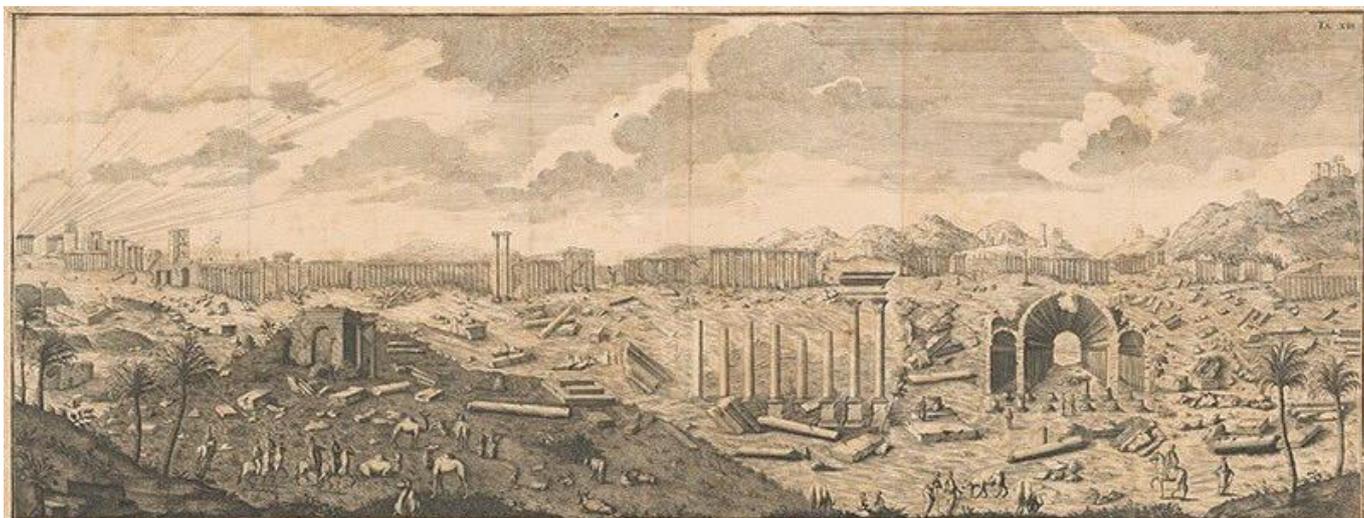
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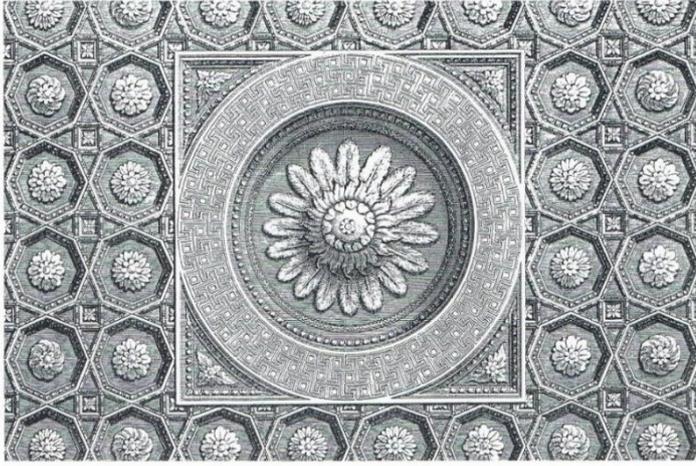
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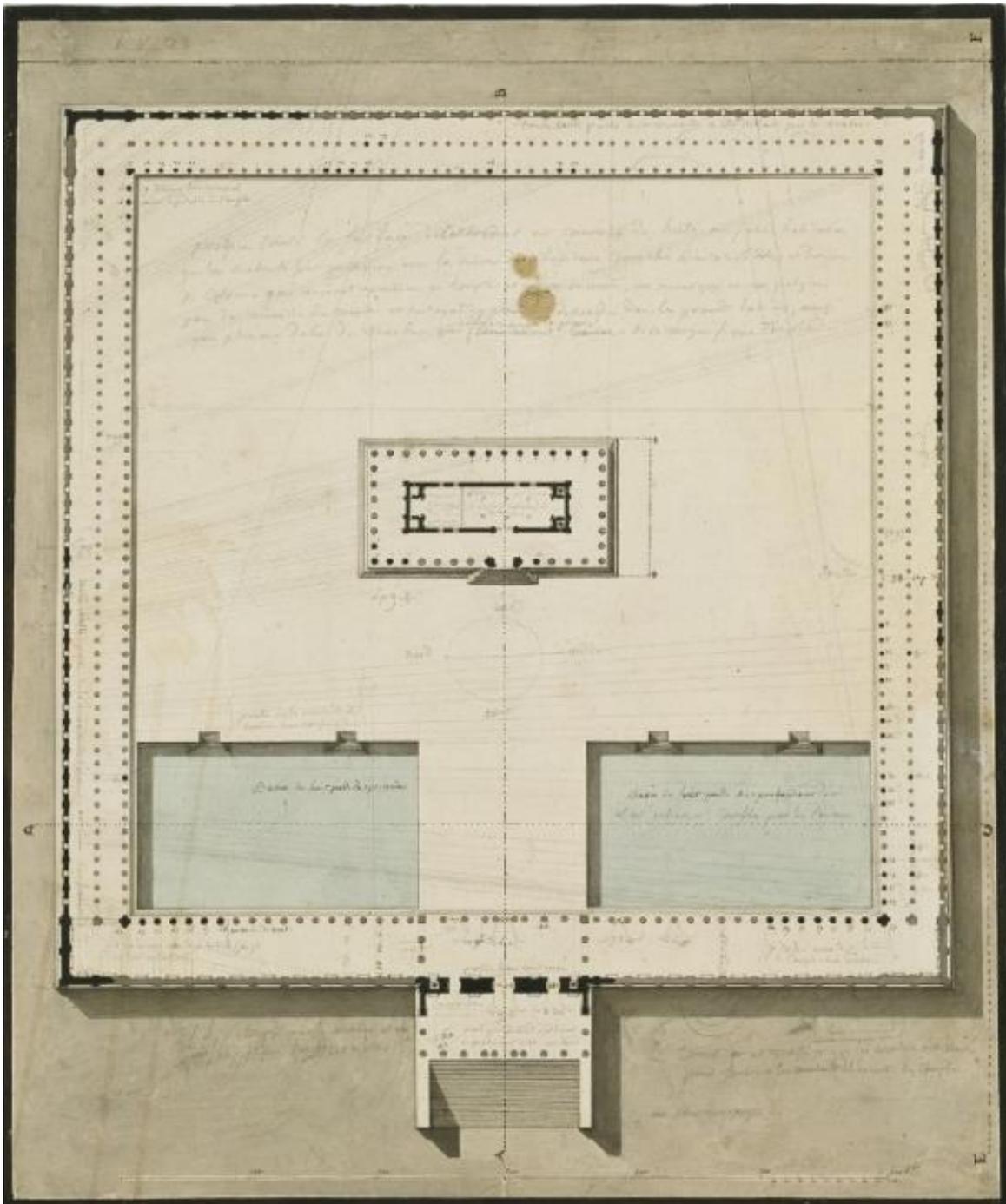
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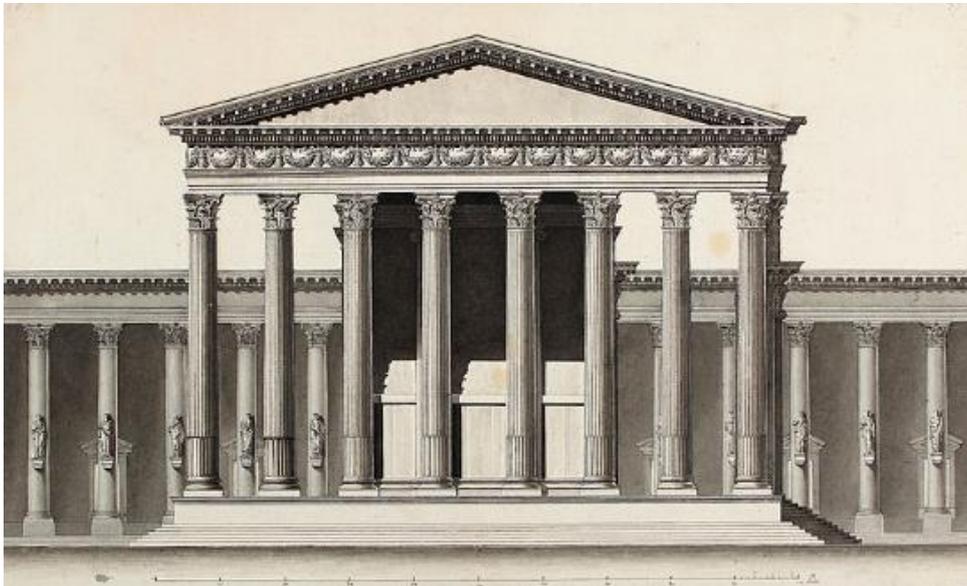
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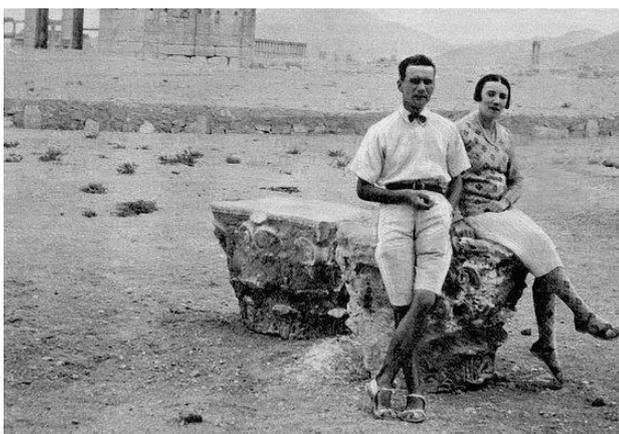
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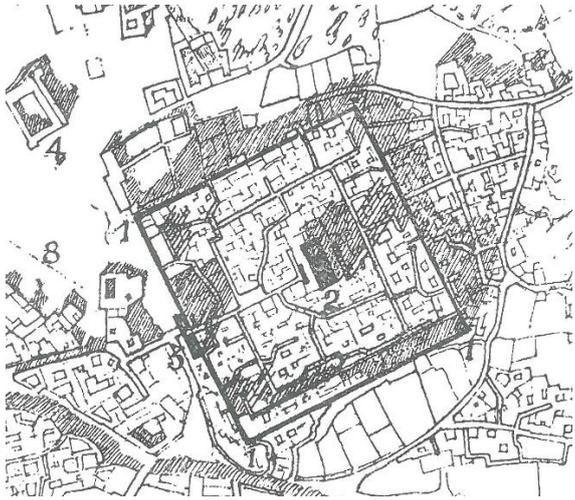
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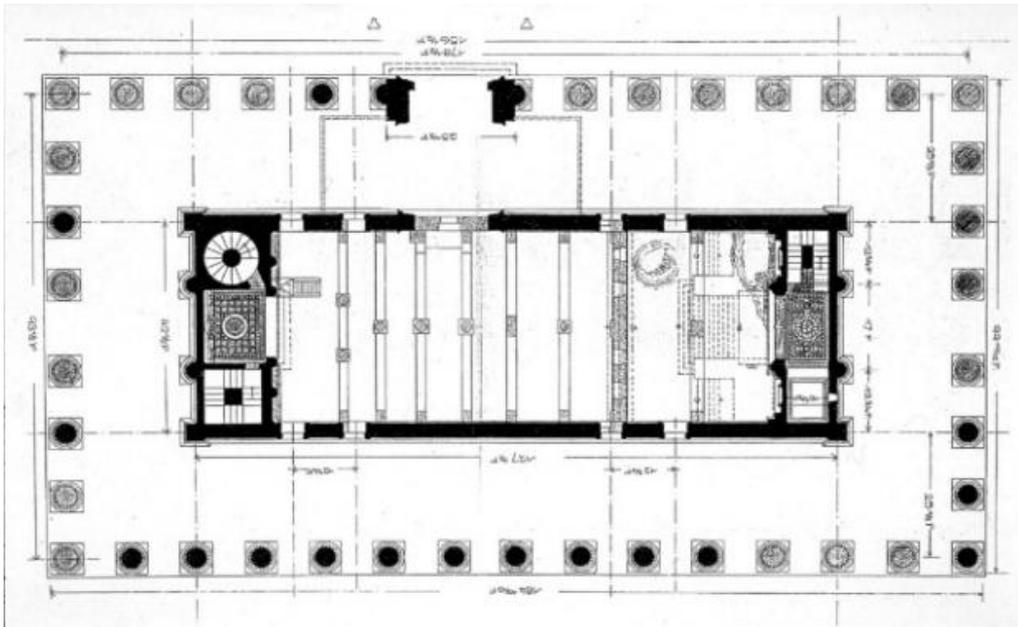
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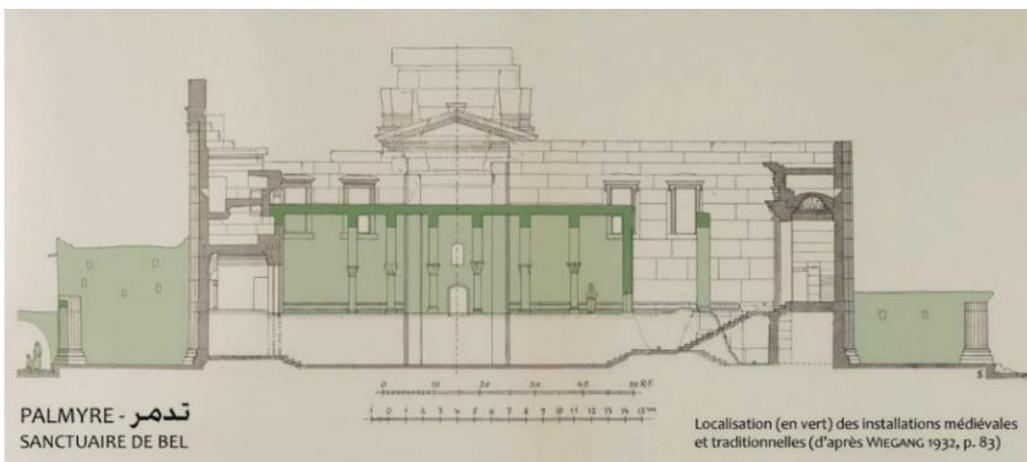
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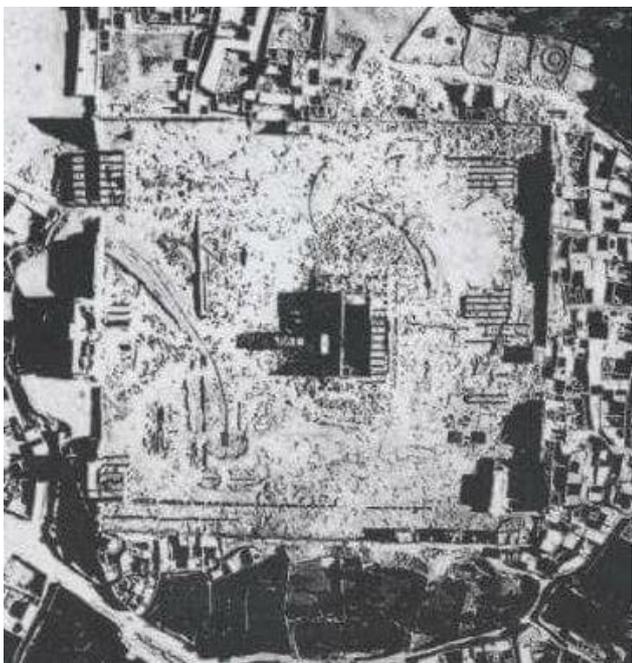
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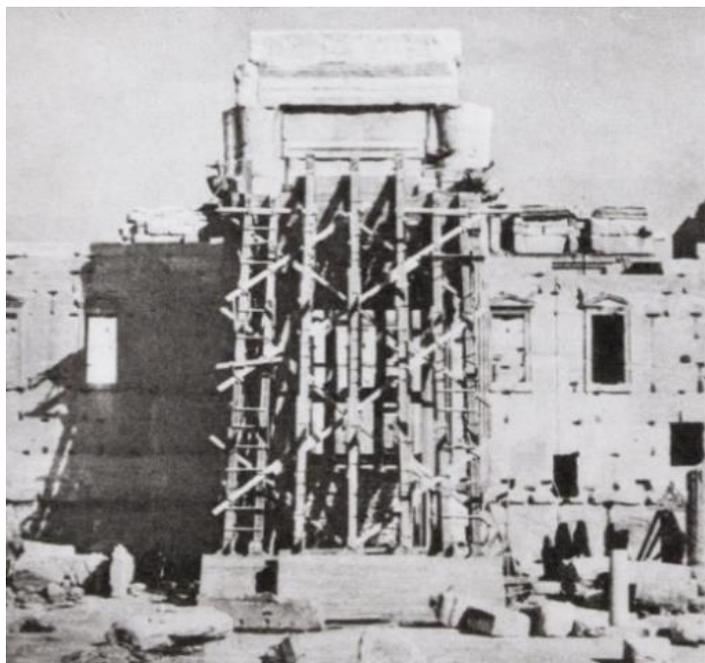
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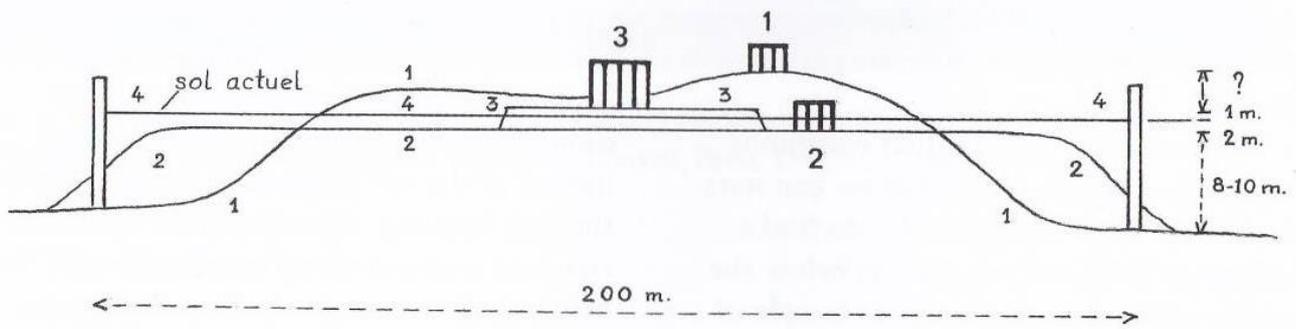
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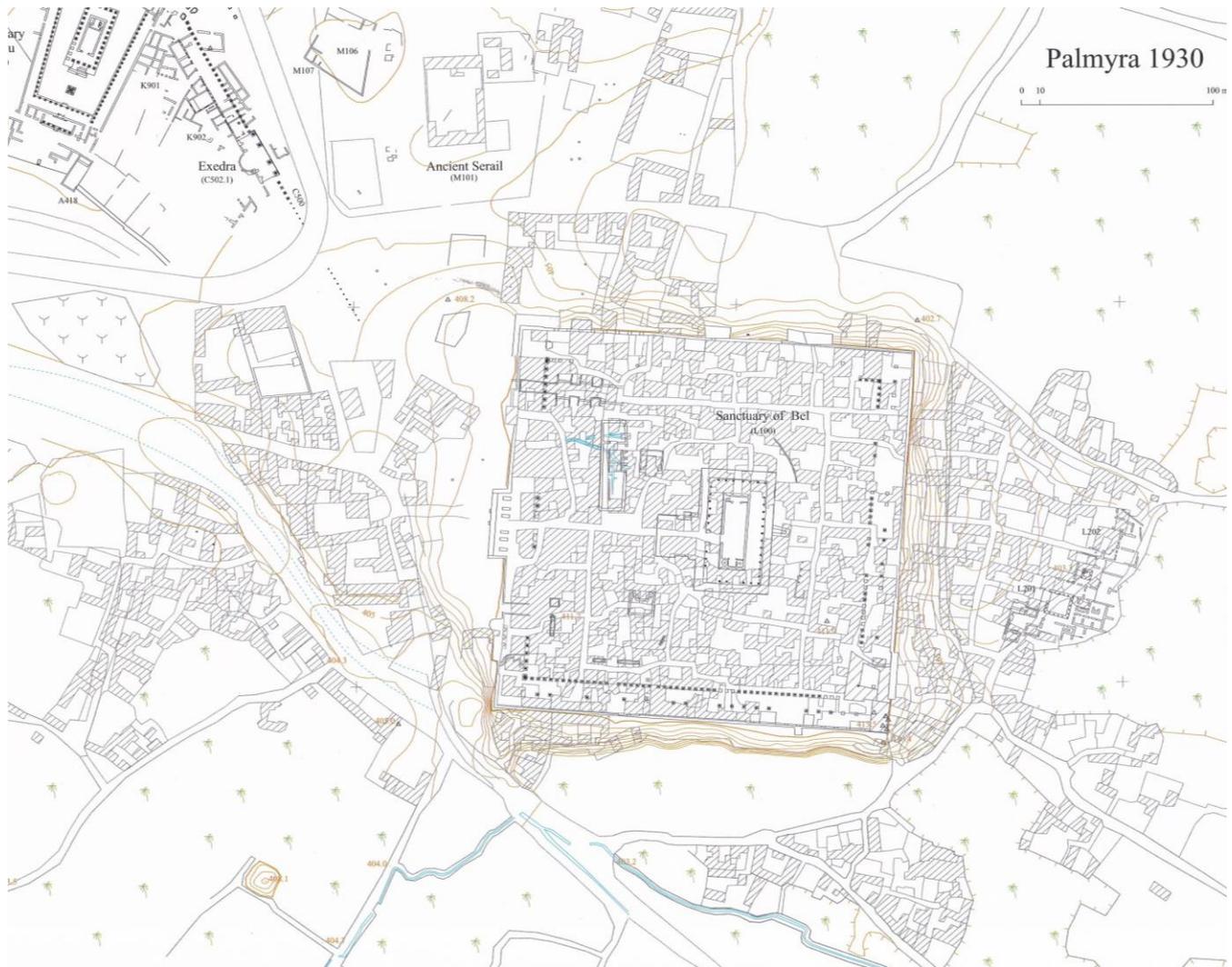
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