

A JOURNEY TO THE CROSSROADS OF ANCIENT EMPIRES

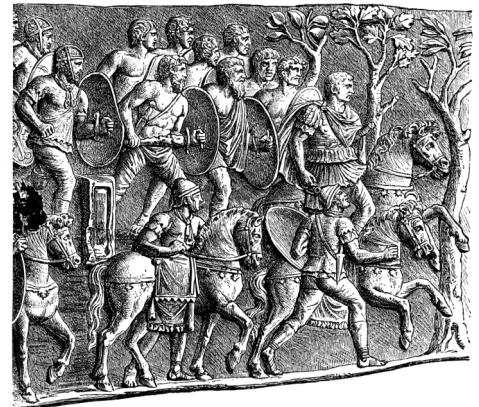
APRIL 1 - 13, 2011



Marc Antony and Octavian were dividing the Roman Empire and Antony claimed the Eastern half based in Syria. Octavian objected and reportedly said something equivalent to “you get all the good stuff!”

He was right: Marc Antony was getting the better part of the bargain. The rich area just South of modern day Turkey has nurtured the development of human kingdoms and empires for millennia, from the Assyrians and Hittites to invaders like Egypt, Alexander the Great, Persians and Romans; even the Crusaders coveted the region North of Judea for its potential tax revenue, trading routes and fertile land for crop growth. It has been a valuable piece of territory for more than 3,000 years. Early Christians found refuge here and there is rich assortment of important landmarks from that period as well.

Cultural historians say that only a society with a sufficiency of wealth and organization can create admirable & impressive architecture and monuments, and each of the cultures and empires who controlled the Near East has left its imprint on the land. For millennia these invaders and native kingdoms have been building entire cities, replete with palaces, city walls, temples, synagogues, churches, basilicas, monuments and public works and an astonishing amount of these structures still stand. Historic caravan routes ~ the Silk Road from India and China, and the Spice Road from Arabia and Africa ~ terminated here and these contributed to the cosmopolitan ambience. Rich brocades and embroidered fabrics of medieval design are still in the markets, as well as hand hammered copper and brass, mountains of spices and other exotic hold-overs from past ages. These physical vestiges are important, but the non-tangible remains of the past are even more telling: one in every ten people is a Christian, and this is the only place in the world where Aramaic - the language spoken by Jesus Christ - is still spoken.



The heavy footsteps of the Roman Emperor Hadrian led German legions through Syria (top) ~ Paul of Tarsus (St. Paul) preached in Damascus ~ Richard the Lionhearted fought Saladin ~ T E Lawrence studied the best Crusader Castles and Hittite Ruins along the upper reaches of the Euphrates River.

Syría is not usually on the radar for most American tourists, but ‘the wheel has turned’ since the death of the old president and the arrival of his more progressive son, so an opportunity exists that wasn’t available only 4 years ago. It’s not unlike the change that occurred when China opened its doors to tourists after many years of being a closed destination. 1000’s of European tourists have been enjoying the remarkable sites in large (and increasing) numbers. The reality is that the Syrian government is still not on friendly terms with Israel, and it is because of that that our own government frequently vilifies their government. But no one can be friendlier than the people, who are just as likely to invite you into their homes to share a meal, and to talk with you wherever they see you. It is infact a fairly diverse country with multiple minority religions and ethnic sub-groups. As is unfortunately so often the case, the government does not accurately reflect the views and attitudes of the people. I feel that I can safely travel there, and if by my presence I can in some minute way contribute to better understanding and goodwill, while also seeing some of the most interesting places in the world, then I will feel satisfied. You are invited to bring your own good will and join me on this journey of understanding.

TRIP DESCRIPTION & ITINERARY

March 31st: Meet the group at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Amman, Jordan (this requires a departure from the US no later than March 30th.) There will be a casual group meeting this evening at the hotel where you'll meet fellow travellers and get any last minute updates. Amman, Jordan.

April 1st: After a buffet breakfast at our hotel we depart for the ancient city of Bosra. We are met and assisted in crossing the Border into Syria, and continue to Bosra where we have lunch on arrival. Bosra is best known for having the finest Roman Theatre in the world, which was buried in sand and obscured by later buildings for centuries: it was not made visible until the 20th century. Bosra was a Nabatean Capital (see my description of *"The Lost Kingdom of Nabatea"* for context,) and it was the capital of the Roman Province of Arabia, but it is mentioned in Egyptian records of 1300 BC, and the impressive Citadel was strengthened by Saladin. We begin our exploration with a guided walking tour of the old Roman city sites (market, the colonnaded and cobbled decumanus (East-West street,) public baths, Nymphaeum (public water fountain,) and the ruins of an early Christian cathedral. Dinner is at our hotel which is located only a few hundred meters from the main sites. B, L, D included. Overnight Bosra



April 2nd: Morning sightseeing of the Theatre and Citadel, and lunch in Bosra. Afternoon drive to Damascus with a stop at Ezra'a, location of two of Syria's oldest functioning churches. The Greek Orthodox Basilica of St. George stands on the site of an earlier pagan temple; legend has it as the burial place of St. George so it is well preserved. The 6th century Melchite Church of St. Elias is also well preserved and is one of the earliest churches built in the shape of a cross. We continue on to Damascus, with a view of the city from Mt. Kassioun en route. Dinner and overnight at our hotel in Damascus, and a free evening for independent exploration. B, L, D included. Damascus



Legend has it that on a journey from Mecca, the prophet Mohammed cast his gaze from the mountainside onto Damascus but refused to enter the city *because he wanted to enter Paradise only once - when he died.* What a reputation to uphold.

And this is what a famous American author said: *".....no recorded event has occurred in the world but that Damascus was in existence to receive news of it. Go back as far as you will into the vague past, there will always be a Damascus...she has looked upon the dry bones of a thousand empires and will see the tombs of a thousand more before she dies."*

Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*, 1869.

DAMASCUS IN 1677

Damascus vies with Aleppo for the title of the world's oldest continually inhabited city and its location on the Barada River has always made it a coveted location. It is impossible to include every detail about a place with such a long and rich history; a more complete picture can only come from a good visit, so *4 nights in Damascus* are included in this tour.

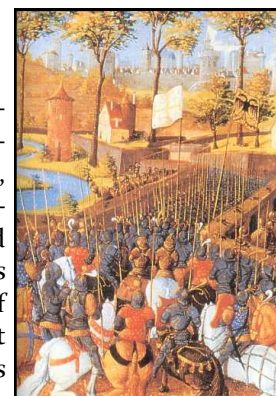
April 3rd: Our first full day will include a walking tour of the sights in the Old City, where most historical sites are located. We begin with the *Umayyad Mosque*. Worship on this site dates back to 3,000 BC when the Aramean's built a temple to their god (mentioned in the book of Kings in the Old Testament) and continues with a Roman Temple of Jupiter and a Christian Basilica where the head of John the Baptist was supposedly contained in a casket (he is the prophet *Yehia* to Muslims.) The mosque was the first great mosque of Islam, which ranks with the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem in importance. There are 3 minarets; the tallest one is the Minaret of Jesus because local tradition has it that this is where Christ will appear on Judgment Day. Alongside the Mosque is the *Mausoleum of Saladin*, (Salah-ad-din in Arabic) the famed chivalrous adversary of the Western Crusaders.

THE Umayyad Mosque



THE SIEGE OF DAMASCUS DURING THE 4TH CRUSADE

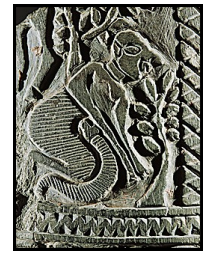
The National Museum contains some extraordinary treasures, including a sculpture garden with important stone statues from around Syria, one of the earliest alphabets in stone, statuettes as old as the Egyptian pyramids, items from Palmyra (which we visit after Damascus.) A 2nd C. colonnaded Synagogue which has beautiful floor to ceiling wall frescoes of scenes from the Old Testament including the crowning of King Solomon, the story of Moses and the flight from Egypt has pride of place in the museum, where it is featured. This is





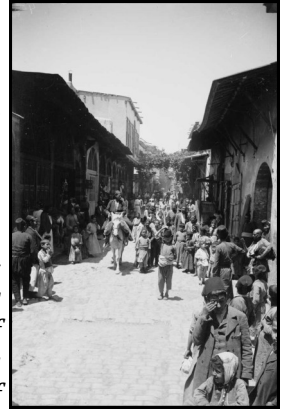
important because depictions of the human form go against Talmudic traditions.

SALADIN RELIEF PANELS IN THE NATIONAL MUSEUM

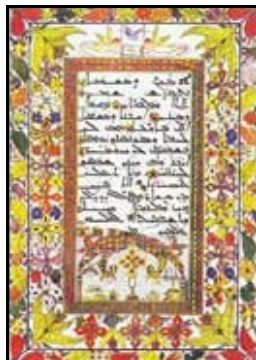
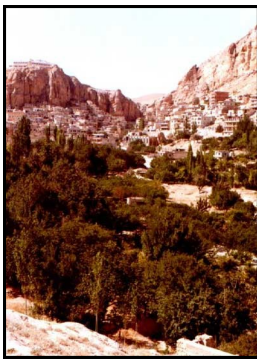


After the museum treasures we'll include a walking tour of "Straight Street" (which is apparently not straight), the main thoroughfare of Greek and Roman times and through a Roman Arch leading to the Christian Quarter where there are numerous churches of Syrian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Armenian, Greek Catholic, Syrian Catholic and Maronite denominations. We'll visit the *Chapel of Ananias*, the 1st century AD

Christian disciple who cured St. Paul of his blindness. We'll visit *St. Paul's Chapel* and the Old City Gate which purportedly marks the spot where disciples lowered Paul out of a window to escape the wrath of a mob. The quarter is home to antique shops and a lively dining and drinking scene. Lunch at a local restaurant is included mid day and there is free time to wander in the "souk" (market.) Free evening and no plans for dinner allow you to extend your sightseeing for as long as you desire. B, L included. Damascus



April 4th: An excursion to two extraordinary places outside of Damascus will happen today.



First we go to the enchanting village of Maalula in the foothills where silvery-blue fairy-tale houses are stacked up against a sheer cliff. **The mainly Greek Catholic village of Maamula is one of the last remaining places where Aramaic, the language of Jesus Christ, is still spoken.** An increased interest in learning Aramaic draws students from around the world, and the Syrian company that is handling our arrangements has made arranged for us to hear a service in Aramaic at the *Monastery and Church of St. Sergius* where 5,000 worshippers still speak it. This linguistic survival easily outdoes the survival of Gaelic in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland, in my opinion. We will also visit the Convent of St.

Theda, a disciple of St. Paula and an early Christian martyr, and the nearby gap through a cliff where her miracle took place.

Above: **MAALULA VILLAGE**, and **WRITTEN ARAMAIC. MAR MUSA MONASTERY** on the right.



After lunch in Maalula we will go to the Monastery of Mar Musa, aka the Monastery of St. Moses, perched high on a Cliffside. Founded in the 6th C. by the King of Abyssinia (modern day Ethiopia and Eritrea), the church has layers of frescoes from the 11th - 13th centuries and is home to both Syrian Catholics and Syrian Orthodox Christians. But it is the location which is most appealing, set high above a plain. Access may be too steep for people who "don't do hills" but that will be left to your own judgment. We return to Damascus where you have a free evening to relax or do some more exploring of the fabulous shops in the 'souks'. B, L included. Damascus

April 5th: My tours are known for including free days when you can choose what you want to see or do, and do it. There is an entire 'old city', fascinating Damascene houses, other religious sites, city walls, a Jewish Quarter, and world renowned shopping for rich embroidered fabrics, brocade, textiles and traditional garments—not to mention a plethora of antique stores! Our hotel or tour company can arrange for guided tours if none of these things suit you. Only breakfast at our hotel is included. Damascus

April 6th: This morning we depart Damascus and travel to *Palmyra*, Syria's star attraction. A sublime sprawling archaeological site, spectacularly set between a lush date palm oasis and a majestic mountain-topped castle, in the middle of vast emptiness. Known to Syrians by its ancient Semitic name of *Tadmor*, it is mentioned in texts from the 2nd mil-

lennium BC and early rulers included the Assyrians and Persians before it was incorporated into the Seleucid Empire (an empire created from a part of Alexander the Great's Empire following his death.) It was an important link on the old Silk Route from China and India to Europe (hence the rich brocades and fabrics still in evidence in Damascene markets), but it fell victim to the conflict between the strengthening Roman Empire of the West and



the Persian Empire to the East. Roman Emperor's visited, armies march through it, and you'll learn the story of it's most famous citizen, the romantic Queen Zenobia.

We have lunch on arrival then visit the Temple of Bel (the single most impressive part of the Palmyra ruins) and the Tombs, and see a panoramic view over Palmyra from near the castle. Free evening. B, L, D included, Palmyra

April 7th: A half day guided sightseeing tour includes the Arch of Triumph, the Great Colonnade (a full kilometer long!), the Tetracylon, the Agora and the Theater. There is free time for lunch on your own (not included) and a free afternoon and evening for independent exploration. Dinner included at our hotel. B, D. Palmyra

April 8th: We depart Palmyra and go to Krak des Chevaliers, the most famous and important Crusader Castle in the world. Described by Travel Writer Paul Theroux as "the dream castle of childhood fantasies", T E Lawrence simply called it "the finest castle in the world." Fought over and passionately defended, it was the last interior stronghold of the Crusader kingdoms. It is intricate with multi-layered defenses and warrants as much time to visit as possible. We will have lunch on arrival, then a guided tour, then some free time. Our hotel has a view of the castle; after dinner you may want to take a walk and savor the castle view. B, L, D. Krak des Chevalier



April 9th: We check out and have a morning visiting the other two most impressive and important Crusade period castles: Qala'at Marqab and Qala'at Salah Ad Din (Saladin.) Lawrence said that "Marqab combined all the best of Latin fortifications in the East." Saladin considered it too strong and bypassed it, deciding to attack less formidable castles in other areas. It eventually fell through mining: digging a mine under the castle walls and lighting a massive

fire which cracked the walls. The other castle is named for Saladin and received high praise from Lawrence: "It was I think the most sensational thing in castle building I have ever seen." One component stands out (literally) above all other devices: the crusaders dug a canyon 28 meters deep to create a giant protective crevice between the castle and the canyon walls opposite, except that they left a needle of rock of the same height which supports the drawbridge. When the bridge is lifted the gap is impossible to cross. Unfortunately, another approach to the castle wasn't so well developed and the castle fell to Saladin after only a 2 day siege. We have lunch at a local restaurant and drive to Apamea.



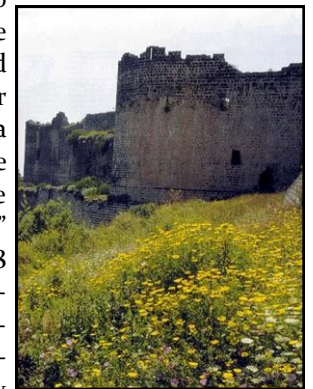
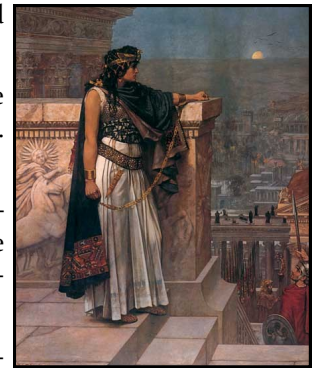
Apamea was founded in the 3rd century BC by Seleucus I, the former general in Alexander the Great's army. It became an important trading post and eventually was seized for Rome by Pompey. At it's height there were 500,000 occupants and it was visited by Marc Antony and Cleopatra. The rich pastureland surrounding it enabled 30,000 mares, 3,000 stallions and 500 elephants to exist! If it wasn't for the size and beauty of Palmyra, Apamea would be the best site of its type but there is just enough difference between the two places to warrant an afternoon visit. From

Apamea we continue to Aleppo, where we have dinner at our hotel and a free evening. B, L, D included. Aleppo

April 10th: Our last major stop is Aleppo, historically the city of commerce and bazaars, with an Old City that is World-Heritage listed and where horse drawn carts still go about on cobblestone streets. We'll include visits to the stunning Citadel (with moat & high walls), the Great Mosque, the Armenian Quarter, two "Souqs", and a Hamam. We'll have lunch at a local restaurant en route, and dinner at our hotel. B, L, D included. Aleppo



April 11th: There are two important excursions outside of Aleppo which command attention, so this morning we take the first one, to the Basilica of St. Simeon, who spent 40 years living in purposeful isolation on top of a self-built pillar. He is supposed to have been the most famous person of the 5th century Western world. The ruins are extremely complete and gloriously situated. We next visit Ain Dara, a Hittite Temple for the worship of the goddess Ishtar, which predates Christ by 1,000 years. We return to Aleppo by early afternoon and the rest of the day and evening are free individual exploration. B included. Aleppo



April 12th: One of the most fascinating sites in the region are “The Dead Cities”, which actually means stone ghost towns from Byzantine times. These are very extensive and range from entire stone villages to single dwellings, and the great mystery is why did the occupants leave? Depending on time we may also visit one of the best preserved Syrian-Byzantine ecclesiastical architecture, the Church of Qalb Lozeh which is built in pre-Romanesque style. Lunch is included at a local restaurant, and our final group dinner is at our hotel tonight. B, L, D included. Aleppo

April 13th: You may opt to depart for home (Aleppo has a good size airport), or you may be taken by our coach to Antakya (the modern name for Antioch) across the border in Turkey to begin my next trip, “*The Kingdom of the Hittites*” which will run approximately April 13 - 26. Further information on that tour will be available soon. This tour ends with either choice (transfer to Antioch or to the Airport.)

DETAILS ABOUT COSTS, INCLUSIONS, PAYMENTS AND GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE TOUR

INCLUSIONS AND COST: The tour cost of \$2250 includes lodging in 4 and 5 star hotels, all sightseeing admission tickets, guiding throughout the entire tour by a professionally trained English speaking Syrian guide; travel in a private chartered air conditioned coach with a designated driver, daily buffet breakfast, lunch on 10 days, dinner on 9 nights (with purposeful omissions of meals on free days or evenings when you do what you choose,) meeting and assistance for arrival and departure, research & planning before the trip and coordination with the guide during the trip by Ken McFarland.

NOT INCLUDED: airfare to or from Syria, any meals or sightseeing except those specified in this brochure; beverages, laundry, internet or other communication costs (phone, fax); trip insurance; tips for guide and driver, Visa for entry; departure tax; any other item of a personal nature.

SINGLE ROOM: A limited number of single rooms are available for a supplement of \$510 on a first come basis and subject to availability. I assist in finding suitable room mates and it is almost always possible to find singles a same gender person to share with however there is no guarantee.

RESERVING A SPACE: The group size is very limited. Please request space by email from ken_mcfarland@earthlink.net and be prepared to mail your deposit once you are confirmed. Please download a Trip Registration Form from my web page and mail that with your deposit. (Web page: www.reeljig.com/mcfarland/)

DEPOSIT AND FINAL PAYMENT: A deposit of \$750 per person is required to save space. Final payment is due in my office on February 1, 2011.

CANCELLATION PENALTY: If you have to withdraw from the tour and I am able to replace you with someone of the same gender (for single travelers) or with a couple (for couple travellers), you can transfer your funds to any future trip organized by Ken McFarland, as long as your withdrawal does not reduce the number of group participants below the minimum needed for this group to travel, which is 15 people. There are no refunds for any un-used portion of the tour (an example of this would be if your airline fails to deliver you by the appointed start date of the tour.)

TRIP INSURANCE: Please consider yourself strongly advised to purchase trip insurance. I have a list of reputable on-line sources for Travel Insurance listed on my web page (www.reeljig.com/mcfarland/) Unlike standard travel agents, I do not receive any kind of remuneration for suggesting that you purchase trip insurance; I advise you to do so just because it is a good thing to do. Please note that in the event that you are unable to join the tour due to an unpredictable act of weather or other forces of nature, or acts of God, acts of War, or for any other cause that cannot be foreseen, such as a strike by airline employees, no refund for any portion of the tour can be made.

DOCUMENTS: A valid passport with at least 6 months remaining validity on the date of your entry into Syria is required for entry into the country. A Visa is required for US travelers and must be obtained in advance while still in the US; information on how to do that will be sent to participants once they have registered for the tour. Please note that Syria does not allow entry to anyone who has an Israeli stamp in their passport so if you have such a stamp you need to get a new passport.

PHYSICAL CONDITION: All of the sites listed except for Mar Musa Monastery can be accessed by people with normal mobility; Mar Musa has a long sidewalk type trail leading to it but it is not unusually high or steep. Most sites are not equipped to handle handicapped individuals.

SPECIAL DIETS AND ALLERGIES: Vegetarians will find good options at meals, however that is the only special diet which is very likely to be available. (There may be food suitable for other dietary needs, it is just not possible to say so with as much certainty.) Please advise when booking if you have a food allergy; advising me of such should not be construed as a guarantee that it can be accommodated. Food at the hotels and restaurants where we will dine is very safe.

SMOKING: I can not accommodate smokers on this trip. Many people including myself are allergic to smoke. If our driver or guide smoke it will be well away from the coach and not on or near it. In our hotels and restaurants we will sit in des-

ignated non-smoking sections when it is possible.

MAILING ADDRESS AND COMMUNICATION: Make all checks payable to Ken McFarland and mail them to: 3875 Geist Road #E323, Fairbanks, Alaska 99709-3549. Because I am a one person operation and I travel often, email is the most dependable way to reach me: ken_mcfarland@earthlink.net but you may also fax me at: (907) 456-7558

COST COMPARISON: I invite you to compare my tour costs with those of the large tour companies who have to maintain a large staff and consequent overhead:

Andante Travel (Britain):	10 days Spring 2011: \$2945
National Geographic expeditions:	11 days, Spring 2011: \$3,770
Archaeological Tours:	no prices given—you have to phone them
AIA (archaeology tours):	no tours listed for Spring 2011
Smithsonian Journeys:	no tours listed
Far Horizons:	14 days: a whopping \$9295!

Tour concept, description and itinerary © Ken McFarland 2010