

# A HISTORY OF SYRIA IN ONE HUNDRED SITES

edited by

**Youssef Kanjou and Akira Tsuneki**

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Cover Illustration: View of the excavation at Hummal site  
© The Syro-Swiss mission on the Palaeolithic of the El Kowm Area

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## 69. Arslan Tash (Aleppo)

Anas Al Khabour

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The site of Arslan Tash is located to the north of Raqqa near Ain Arab in Sharon village. The name means 'the stone lions' in the Turkish language and reflects the fact that there were lion statues at the entrance of the site. The site was known in the Assyrian period by the name of Hadatu or Khadatu, which came from the name of the Aramaean ruler of the city. The coordinates of the location are (36° 50' 57.18"N 38° 24' 34.11" E).

The site was important for the Ottoman authorities and Mr Hamdi Beck director of the Museum of Istanbul moved several stone statues to the Istanbul Museum after 1833. In 1928 the French mission from the Louvre, led by F. Thureau Dnagin, began excavations and discovered the oval city (750 x 550m), surrounded by a mudbrick wall built on a stone foundation (Fig. 1). The city wall

has three gates equipped with huge stone lions bearing inscriptions. In 2007, a Syrian-Italian mission began to work at the site, led by the author and Maria Tshikini from the University of Bologna. The mission re-documented the site and also undertook a topographic survey of and re-measured the archaeological data concerning the previous excavations at the site.

Excavations uncovered the Assyrian palace which consists of two parts: the administrative section comprising a hallway, surrounded by small rooms on three sides. The hallway led to the entrance of large reception hall, as well as to a number of rooms or offices. The second section is the residential section, which is located at the back and has a patio surrounded by living quarters for the royal family and connecting to a

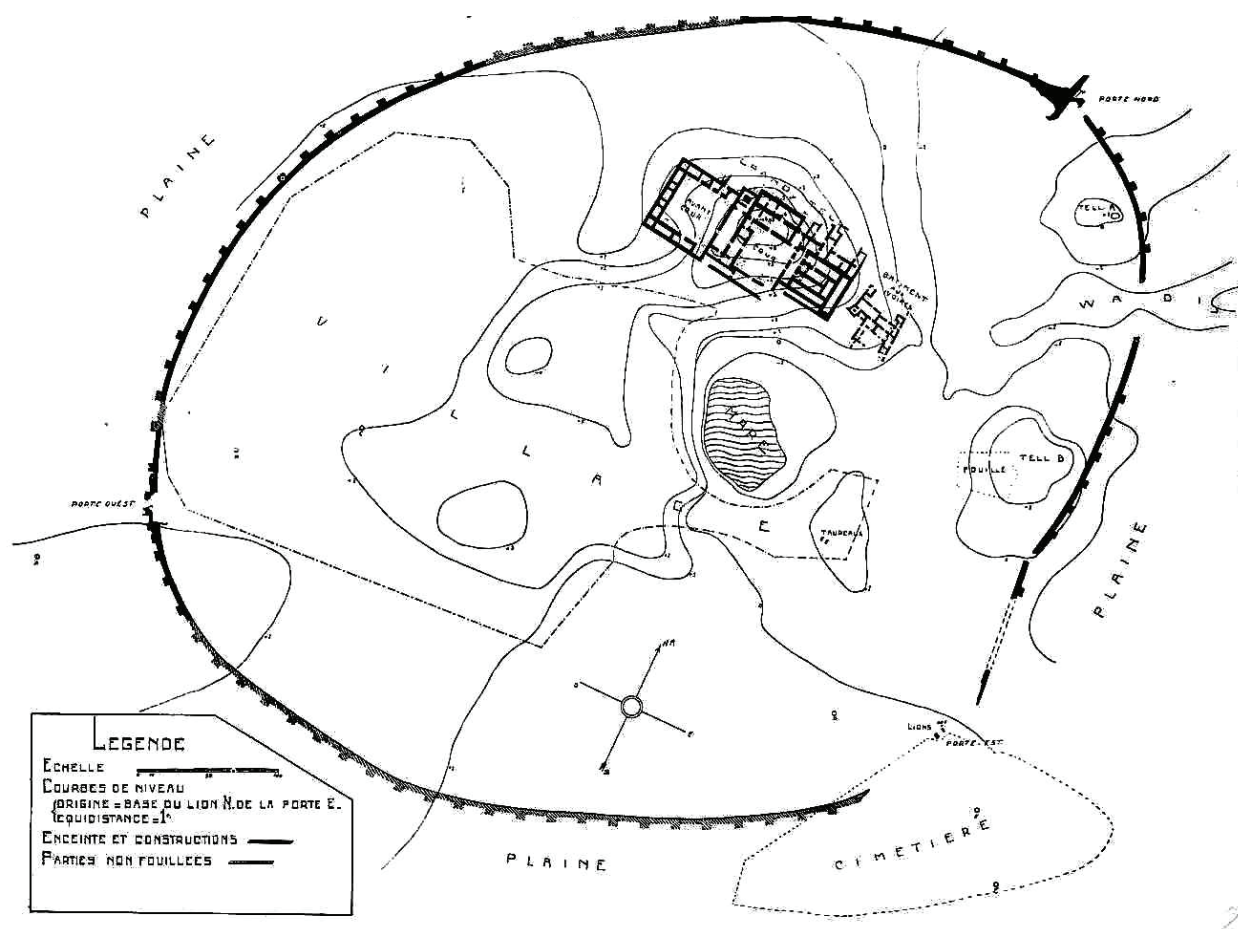


FIG. 1 PLAN OF ARSLAN TASH  
(AFTER DANGIN 1931).

## A HISTORY OF SYRIA IN ONE HUNDRED SITES

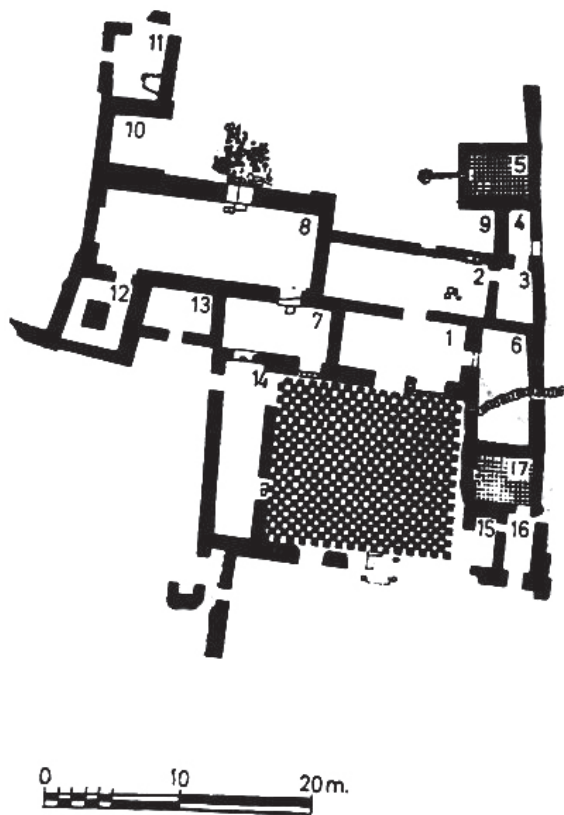


FIG. 2 PLAN OF THE 'HOUSE OF THE IVORIES'  
(AFTER DANGIN 1931).

large reception hall. The eastern section comprises rooms that may have been utilized as depots or for storage. Murals covered the walls of some rooms, in addition to horizontal friezes 80cm long with geometric decorations (circles and squares) that are now displayed in the galleries of the Aleppo National Museum (Fig. 2).

It is worth mentioning that a large building excavated next to the palace is of an older date than the palace period. The date of this building is between the 9th-8th

century BC, and it was called the 'House of Ivories' from the discovery there of a large number (112) of ivory artefacts of high quality (Fig. 3).

The themes depicted vary from plant decorations (palm trees, etc.), and animal motifs (cows, deer, etc.), as well as human subjects including men and women. They include themes inspired by Norse mythology, such winged men witnessing the birth of Horus and wearing the dual Egyptian crown and holding a lily in each hand (Fig. 4).

The ivory objects immortalized the victory of the Assyrian King Add Nerari against the King of Aram Damascus, Hazaael (843-805 BC). A wooden bed found at the site was moved from Damascus as booty and bears inscriptions that indicate that it belonged to King Hazaael.

The temple is partially excavated; at the entrance there are two great bull statues with inscriptions commemorating King Tokolti Eli Chara III, who built the temple, which was dedicated to the worship of the goddess Ishtar. Also discovered were six statues of various gods, the most important being a horned god, the presence of horns representing divinity. This statue is now in the Aleppo Museum.

Perhaps what distinguishes the site of Arslan Tash most are the inscriptions representing the population mix among peoples of the region (Aramaean, Assyrians and Hittites) under the authority of the Assyrian Empire. The most important details represented by these inscriptions were on the lions that were transferred to the city of Raqqa in 1983 and placed in a public park. Unfortunately IS (Daesh) blew up these immortal ruins on 24 August 2014 and they are now lost forever.

The inscriptions represent texts written in three languages on each side of the lions. The Aramaean text was examined by Ali Abu Assaf, the Assyrian text by



FIG. 3 IVORY  
REPRESENTATION OF A COW  
SUCKLING HER CALF, 8TH  
CENTURY  
(LOUVRE MUSEUM, PARIS).



FIG. 4 IVORY REPRESENTATION OF THE BIRTH OF HORUS, 8TH CENTURY (LOUVRE MUSEUM, PARIS).

Wolfgang Roligh, and the Hittite text by Hawkins. The Aramaean text consists of eight lines, starting with the governor Enra Bolaser (in Assyrian Ninorta Bolaser), governor of the fort of Shalmaneser (Tel Bersib or now Tell Ahmar), located 20km from Arslan Tash; Shemesh Elu built the gates of the Arslan Tash from cedar. The last three lines request the gods to protect the city and there is a prayer to the Lord of Assyria to destroy all who try to tarnish the name of Enra Bolaser (Fig. 5).

On the second lion, which was in Raqqa, the text included nine lines: the first three are fragments and the others refer to the works of Enra Bolaser.

The author, who wrote both texts, tried to explain the circumstances of Arslan Tash and refers to Sarin (the current town located to the south of Jarabulus) and Khelakh, to the east of Luban. The latter means 'white' and may be a reference to the current city of Tell Abied. The texts refer to the work of Enra Bolaser in the city of his father (Hadata), who built the streets and new city gates.

Taken together, this research demonstrates the role of the archaeological excavations at the site, highlighting the importance of the Hadata (Arslan Tash) site as a city that represented a marvelous coexistence between the mixed populations of Aramaean, Assyrian and Hittite. Arslan Tash played an important role in the region in terms of its monuments, such as the palace, the 'House of Ivories' and the temple, which are a unique

testimony to Syrian fine art, with the artistic effects reflecting the reality of the political context of that time.

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FIG. 5 BASALT LION FROM THE SITE OF ARSLAN TASH (AFTER DANGIN 1931).