

**HELLENISTIC
ARCHITECTURE IN
SYRIA. A DISSERTATION**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649018154

Hellenistic Architecture in Syria. A dissertation by S. Butler Murray

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S. BUTLER MURRAY

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ARCHITECTURE IN
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Hellenistic Architecture in Syria

A DISSERTATION

PRESENTED TO THE
FACULTY OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE
OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY
S. BUTLER MURRAY, JR.

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS
PRINCETON
LONDON: HUMPHREY MILFORD
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
1917

Published December, 1917

Accepted by the Department of Art and Archaeology
April, 1912

Printed in the United States of America



WF127
M96

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PREFACE

The purpose of this thesis is to show that the architecture of Syria up to the end of the third century A.D. was Hellenistic. In general only dated monuments have been considered, or those whose period can be determined with certainty. With these restrictions, all the monuments of Northern Central Syria and of the Djebel Hauran, showing details of any importance, have been considered. Baalbec, as being in process of publication, has been omitted except for occasional reference. South of the Hauran only the ruins at Arak il-Emir have been included, with those of Djerash and Amman for reference. Monuments published by Mr. H. C. Butler since April, 1912, are not included.

In the spelling of names the system has been followed that is employed by Dr. Enno Littmann in the publications of the American Archaeological Expedition to Syria in 1899-1900 without the use of diacritical signs. For a clearer illustration of some details reference has been made to the photographs taken by the same expedition. Full sets of these may be secured on application to the American Archaeological Expedition to Syria, University Library, Princeton, N. J., U. S. A.

I desire to take this opportunity to extend to Professors Allan Marquand and Charles Rufus Morey my grateful acknowledgment for their guidance and criticism in my studies in archaeology: but especially I acknowledge my very great indebtedness to Professor Howard Crosby Butler. It was at his suggestion that this investigation was begun, and his invaluable aid, both in material and suggestion, alone made it possible.

S. BUTLER MURRAY, JR.

Merwick, Princeton University,
April, 1912.
Revised, July, 1917.

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HELLENISTIC ARCHITECTURE IN SYRIA

INTRODUCTION

In his "Kleinasien," Strzygowski, speaking of the architecture of the East in the fourth century, has pointed out that it "nicht anderes als eine Art Nachblüte sein dürfte von dem, was die hellenistische Kunst des Orients auf diesem Gebiete schon früher geschaffen haben muss."¹ and again, "Was Konstantin in seinen Monumentalbauten an den Anfang der christlichen Reichskunst stellte, das war nicht funkelnagelneu aus dem Boden gestampft, sondern nur möglich im Gefolge einer grossen Entwicklung der hellenistischen Architektur in den Grosstädten des Orients. Von ihr aber wissen wir bis heute so gut wiegar nichts."²

We have, indeed, only too scanty remains of this developed Hellenistic art, such as must have flourished at Antioch. Yet in the rest of Syria, and especially at Palmyra, there is a wealth of material. Little or no attention has been paid to the architecture of Syria beyond the splendid publication of the monuments by M. de Vogue and by Howard Crosby Butler. References to it fall into two classes; some simply assume it to be Greek, while others call Roman everything that belongs to our era, the period of Roman political supremacy³ either classification being made without any specific details or proof. Butler alone has directly denied the Roman influence in the architecture of this time,⁴ and he suggested this investigation of details.

As was stated in the preface, it has been necessary in general to consider only dated monuments. Yet the number of these is so great, and the evidence they offer so varied and so striking, that only a presentation of details by single monuments could suffice. Furthermore, such strong Oriental influence was, in many cases, present beside the Greek, that only the presentation of the monuments as a whole could lead clearly to the necessary conclusions. This has caused much borrowing from Butler's publications. Without his permission to use his material it would have been impossible to present this chapter in Syrian architecture.

Syrian monuments have been divided into two great classes; those built before Roman dominion, and those succeeding it.⁶ But it by no means follows that the advent of Roman political power meant the advent of Roman artistic supremacy. Pompey's campaign was too hurried to be lasting even in its military results; and later we find Antony attempting to plunder Palmyra as an alien and hostile city.⁷

The effect of Roman conquest upon the conquered territory was political reorganization. Laws and government they imposed, but religion and the arts they took unto themselves from the conquered people. It was as if the Roman obeyed literally the command--

Tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento;
Hæ tibi erunt artes; pacisque imponere morem,
Parcere subiectis et debellare superbos.

As Butler has said in speaking of the region of the South—"What we call the 'Roman architecture' was not an art that was brought from overseas and transplanted in new soil, but represented the mere extension of the art of one portion of Syria to another portion—from Greek Syria to Semitic Syria—a process which Rome, with her wonderful power for organization and amalgamation accomplished as doubtless no other power could have done."

The comparative peace and security afforded by Roman rule and the stable organization of civil affairs made possible the further development of an architecture that was an heritage when the Romans first came and which had already made its force felt at Rome.⁸ To show this is the aim of this discussion but for the Romans to *introduce* an art of their own was impossible if for no other reason than that they had none, but were borrowing from just these provinces, with which conquest had brought them into contact, and were carrying home the spoil that made Rome the clearing house of the world. In the Imperial architecture of Rome we find only another species of Hellenistic architecture with certain local modifications, the results of its new environment. Even the strongest adherents of Rome as an artistic center, originating rather than receptive, claim only the arch and all that it involves as an individual feature. Yet we shall see that the arch was used in Asia Minor in Hellenistic times before Rome had finished her struggles with Carthage. And it is doubtful whether Etruria, in

bequeathing the arch to the other Italian peoples, did not merely pass on what she herself had received from the East.

It would be absurd enough to speak of Rome introducing forms of her art upon another, when she had received them from the common parent; but a worse field than Syria for such a transplanting could scarcely be imagined. As Diehl has said in speaking of Syria—"In spite of the profound influence exerted by Greek civilization, in spite of the long duration of Roman domination, the country had always remained 'fort particulariste'—Assuredly the great cities, such as Antioch, had become, quickly enough, capitals of Hellenism—but, beneath this veneer of Hellenism, there persisted, above all in the country, the characteristic traits of the Semitic race, so deeply impressed on their souls that Syrian Christianity took its special character from them."⁹

Negative criticism in itself is worthless. Therefore it has not been sufficient to show that the Syrian monuments are not Roman: the attempt has also been made to recognize those elements that are Oriental, and particularly to notice original features, such as the arched intercolumniation, which show that this Hellenism in Syria was not the last effort of a decadence, but a living growth, possessing in itself the power for further and greater development.

Comparison has been made most frequently with Hellenistic monuments of Asia Minor; not that Syria necessarily borrowed from Asia Minor, but because Asia Minor best represents the stage of Greek civilization before and during the period under consideration. Had we any knowledge of Antioch, the capital of the world, which was by far the most influential center of the East, there would probably be no thesis to prove. As it is, we must turn to other and less important centers for the material for comparison.

Attention has already been called to the fact that the Syrian architecture shows a quite different spirit from that shown in the monuments at Rome.¹⁰ And, as the consideration of the individual monuments will show, this is a Greek rather than Roman spirit.

In the case of the earliest monuments it is, of course, impossible to deny that they are a direct Hellenistic heritage. The Kasr il-Abd at Arak il-Emir, the temples and tomb at Suweda, and the two temples at Si were all built before the Romans could secure even a definite political influence in the country.