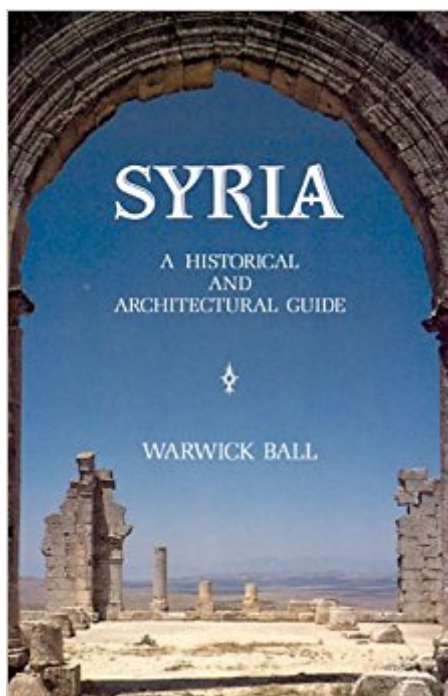


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Syria: A Historical And Architectural Guide



Synopsis

revised & updated edition With a wealth of historical splendors matched by few other countries, Syria has remained almost undiscovered by mass tourism. As a result, little has been spoiled, much is unknown, and there is much to discover. It is a land of immense antiquity, boasting cities and archaeological remains that are among the oldest in the world. Hittites, Hurrians and Hebrews, Aramaeans, Assyrians and Arabs, Egyptians, Canaanites, Persians, Nabateans, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Crusaders, Turks and French have all come, leaving behind some of the most spectacular monuments that can be seen anywhere. Today, entire deserted cities such as Palmyra or Resafeh, immense castles like Crac des Chevaliers and a bewildering array of palaces, mosques, temples, theatres, churches and other ruins strewn across the country provides Syria with one of the richest and most diverse heritages in the world. Syria's timeless monuments overawe the visitor. But they can enchant as well: to lose oneself in the back-streets and bazaars of old Damascus and Aleppo - still perhaps the most wholly satisfying traditional cities of the Arab world today - or to experience the sheer enchantment of the utterly haunting Dead Cities - probably the greatest concentration of ruins in the entire Mediterranean - is to experience travel at its very best. Most of all, the visitor to Syria meets with the characteristic courtesy and hospitality to outsiders that makes travel in the Arab world such a pleasure. Syria is still 'the best kept secret'. The new completely revised and updated edition of this book is to keep pace both with the rapid increase in travel to Syria and the new material which has appeared on Syria itself. With lucid and informative text, this book reconsiders the history and heritage of Syria and surveys the major sites, making a strong case for reassessing its importance in our perception of the growth of civilization out of the Middle East. With its many site plans and maps, readable text and 96 color plates, it makes available the immensely wealthy history, archaeology and architecture of Syria to the general reader and the interested traveler.

Book Information

Paperback: 255 pages

Publisher: Interlink Pub Group; Revised and Updated edition (2007)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1566566657

ISBN-13: 978-1566566650

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 0.9 x 8.7 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.7 out of 5 stars 4 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #520,225 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #67 in [Books > History > Middle East > Syria](#) #170 in [Books > Travel > Middle East > General](#) #932 in [Books > Arts & Photography > Architecture > History](#)

Customer Reviews

Warwick Ball is a Near Eastern archaeologist and author who spent over thirty years carrying out excavations, architectural studies and monumental restoration throughout the Middle East and adjacent regions. He first visited Syria in 1972 and has been back numerous times since. He is author of many books and articles on the history and archaeology of the region, including (with Leonard Harrow) *Cairo to Kabul*. His recent book, *Rome in the East: The Transformation of an Empire*, was winner of the James Henry Breasted History Prize in 2000 and was a Choice Outstanding Academic Book. Born in Australia, he now lives in Scotland.

Just what I needed for my latest writing assignment. Lots of useful information AND photos to give you a feel for the place. It's hard to write about a place you've never been to, so when I'm researching a place I need information and photos both; you can't write with any sense of authority without having a real sense of the place you're writing about. This book was one of several I ordered to get that "sense," and I have referred to it again and again. I was also fascinated to learn about the archaeological dig at Resafa, and about the Umayyad palace that had been there -- something several other books overlooked but which turned out to be critical information for me. Well written, scholarly but spare, and jam-packed with good usable information.

The guide book is perfect for a quick reference source of the sights to see in Syria and I will surely carry it with me when I travel there next year. Only wish the maps had a little more detailed info or maybe more maps. But it is great for a planning my trip.

If you are traveling as a tourist to Syria (as I recently did), this is THE book to read: an intelligent layman's guide to the architectural (above all archaeological) wonders of Syria, which are the primary reason for tourist visits there. It is one of only two texts in English which occupy the wide gap between, on the one hand, a cursory "Lonely Planet" guide approach (I much value "Lonely Planet" but, let's face it, such tourist manuals do not delve very deeply), and--on the other hand-- a mind-numbing plethora of narrowly focused, deadly dull, and hard-to-get academic monographs on

small slices of Syrian phenomena. The only book currently competing with Ball's to fill this gap is "The Monuments of Syria: A Guide" by Ross Burns. The latter is a Baedeker-style encyclopedic gazeteer of most/all Syrian archaeological sites; its broad scope means you get descriptions of many minor sites you are unlikely to visit, but not always as much information as you would like on the major sites you will see. We should be immensely grateful to Burns for his effort, but it is most appropriate for those planning to spend more than two weeks or so in Syria and to go beyond all the major sites. For those spending 2 weeks or less, Ball's book is the one for you if you only want to buy one text. (But you still might well consider Burns' book as a very useful adjunct.) Besides the virtues of its individual site descriptions, Ball's text offers very helpful and concise introductory overviews of the history and geography of Syria, and above all a broad survey of the various architectural trends and styles one will see at the different sites.

A word about the author. Warwick Ball is a long-time Middle Eastern archaeologist (with much experience in Syria and Jordan) who retired his trowel some years ago to found a blue-chip tour company (with focus on the Middle East) headquartered in Scotland, where he now lives. I serendipitously encountered him and his book at a lecture he gave on Afghanistan at Washington, DC's Smithsonian Institution in early 2010. A couple minor nits re the book. Ball can be repetitive in harping on certain points, especially his all too oft stated observations which link virtually any cubist structure in Syria back to early South Arabian prototypes. He is a "booster" on Syria (as you would expect from one who spent a lot of time and effort there), so you need to discount a bit his more enthusiastic claims about everything Syrian and some of the sites there. That said, I can tell you the country IS worth visiting and does have some "drop dead" archaeological sites and is getting a lot of Western (above all West European) tourism nowadays. Finally, the maps Ball employs for the book are borrowed and not designed specifically to support his text, so they are not entirely satisfactory. Above all, if you contemplate wandering around the souks (markets) of old Damascus, you're going to need a more detailed map than this book provides if you don't want to get hopelessly lost. But these are minor criticisms which should not obscure the great virtue of this book: it almost single-handedly fills a need for those bound for Syria, and it does so very well.

Syria is a very ancient country that dates back to the start of time and has seen a lot in its day, Syria has been a Muslim country for over 1,090 years and before that Syria was mainly Christian. Today, Syria is about 90% Muslim (mostly Sunni, Alawite, and Druze) and 10% Christian (mostly Syrian, Greek, and Armenian Orthodox). And both the Prophets of Christianity and Islam have come through Syria in their lifetimes. The population is 90% Arab (mainly Syrian 74.9%, Palestinian 3.9%,

Bedouin 7.1%, and Iraqi), the rest are Kurds who live in northeastern Syria, Armenians who live mostly in Aleppo and Kassab, and Turkmens who all make up the remaining 10%.

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