RESHAPING DAMASCUS: SOCIAL CHANGE AND PATTERNS OF ARCHITECTURE IN LATE OTTOMAN TIMES

STEFAN WEBER
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Stefan Weber

Cities are heterogeneous structures of social organization. Thousands of men and
women carry out their daily lives within this complex urban system and leave their mark
on the city's appearance. Cities are an expression of the collective action of their inhabi-
tants, corresponding to cultural traditions, given urban and natural environments, people's
understanding of urban space, historical developments, and concepts of cultural
identity. Cultural changes, often accompanied by shifts in individual and collective
identities, can be observed where human action takes place: in public and private archi-
tecture as well as in the general urban fabric. Urban centers are shaped by conventions
and organization of a society in the same way that houses are influenced by individual
tastes and the requirements of organization of private life. In this sense the physical
appearance of cities provide a rich source for the study of urban culture – especially in

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other articles of mine and will be indicated respectively. A detailed documentation of the buildings men-
tioned in this article will not be given here, but is can be found in S. Weber, “Zeugnisse kulturellen Wan-
dels; Stadt, Architektur und Gesellschaft des spätopmanischen Damascus im Umbruch (1808-1918),” un-

The Syrian National Archives (Mar'āz al-Waḥdiyya al-Türkhiyya) will be abbreviated as MWT, S for waḥdiyya
and W for waḥdiyya. The Public Record Office in London as PRO (FO - Foreign Office) and the Politis-
ches Archiv of the Auswärtiges Amt in Bonn as AA. The yearbook of the Ottoman Province of Syria
(Süriye Vilâyeti Siyâsesi) will be abbreviated Sîrîname volume (year hīfī / year mīlīfī) page.
times of cultural change. This is also true for the interpretation of collective and individual identities.

Four hundred years of Ottoman rule (1516-1918) have left a distinctive imprint on the urban centers of Syria. Ottoman concepts of architecture have had a tangible influence on the institutions of Syria’s cities. The capital of the Ottoman province of Syria (eyālet Șam-e Sharifwilāyat Sūriyya), Damascus, was significantly modified by the construction of public buildings and houses, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The aim of this chapter is to analyze some of the changing aspects of urban layout and architecture and try to understand whether they are manifestations of cultural change and identity.

Building modern Ottoman Damascus

Following the Tanzimat and the efforts of centralization and modernization during the course of the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the city of Damascus, like many other Ottoman cities, witnessed far-reaching changes in its urban texture. The return of Ottoman central power through its enlarged facilities of administration, transportation (new streets, steam boats, and later railways), and communication (telegraph) connected the town to a new international network and had an overwhelming impact on Damascus. The urban texture of the city changed rapidly during the decades after the provincial reforms of 1864 right to the end of Ottoman rule in Damascus in 1918. The city itself became the object of extensive town planning carried out by a completely new administrative body. A new water system, electric streetlights and tramways were installed throughout the city between 1906 and 1907. Many streets in the old town, intra and extra muros, were enlarged and various new

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streets were built throughout the city. Due to an enormous demographic growth, new urban areas were settled and whole new quarters of the city founded (e.g. Muhājīrin, `Aff, `Arrūs, Shuhadā, Hijāz, Barāmka and Qaṣṣā; see fig. 1).

With the laying out of Marja Square a new public center was founded close to the first Ottoman saray of the sixteenth-century Darwīshiyā Street (see fig. 2). Numerous administrative buildings, (such as the municipality building, two sarays, police headquarters, law court etc.), hotels, and modern transport facilities (railway stations and tramway headquarters) were built. Public places such as parks, coffee houses, and theaters were located there and provided a space for growing public life and discussion.

The new Ottoman society

Within the Damascene elites this adoption of new principles of shaping public and private architecture was accompanied and represented by titles, fashion, and higher education; the best known example of this new fashion was the jarbūsh (fez) which replaced the turban. Images of Damascene street scenes at the beginning of the twentieth century indicate that throughout different social classes the jarbūsh had become the most prominent headwear. Other elements of clothing changed as well, and became a sign of a new style of living. Moreover, titles like Bey (Bilād), Efendi, and Pasha were lavishly granted. Damascus society was changing, not least because of education reforms and new print media. In the last five decades of Ottoman rule, more than seventy schools were founded in the city – expanding the intellectual horizons of their pupils by new curricula. Newspapers, magazines, and the increasing number of printed books played an important role in an intellectual innovation. The middle- and upper-class career paths, characterized by academic, military, and civil service, are evidence of a vivid and unprecedented exchange between Damascus and Istanbul. Ottoman state schools, military and administrative institutions, and new transport and communication links between the two cities facilitated the increasing exchange that developed between the center of the empire and one of its most important provincial capitals. Even before the new law of citizenship in 1869 people in the empire were no longer Ottoman subjects (reāyā/ra`ayā) but Ottoman citizens (teba`a/taba`a); People from Damascus who had profited from the new system or worked in the enlarged administration, and Syrian graduates from the Mülkiye in particular, became protagonists of modernization within

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Ottoman society. Dressed as modern Ottomans they introduced patterns of a new style of living and of urban organization to the provinces of the empire.

The continuously growing Ottoman character of the townscape had started with the modernization of the urban fabric of Damascus. But who built modern Ottoman Damascus? What ideas influenced and motivated the owners of the buildings? Was it only the Ottoman administration that was modernizing the city, or were private individuals and groups of people belonging to other social classes involved as well? The example of the sūq will help us to answer these questions.

The modernization of a traditional urban institution: the late Ottoman sūq (bazaar)

The sūq, the commercial center of the city, is a good example of how urban institutions changed. The building activities in the sūq districts, intra and extra muros, were particularly impressive. Nearly everything was rebuilt and, unlike bazaars in other towns of the empire, several bazaars in Damascus conserve their late Ottoman structure. Starting in the west at Marja Square, new or renovated bazaars connected the new city center with the old markets at Taht al-Qal'a. In this quarter huge new sūqs were built to the south and west of the citadel and led from there to the Umayyad Mosque and its surrounding markets (see fig. 3). In addition, the traditional Ottoman bazaar area to the south and southwest of the Umayyad Mosque was heavily restructured. Sūqs such as al-Hamidiyya, al-Khayyān, al-Buzāriyya and Sūq Midhat Bāshā were widened, and wide shopping streets now connected the old city center to the new one in the west of the city.6

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The layout of the modernized sūqs

The new sūqs looked quite different from their predecessors. With their modern design – their regular façades à la mode on two floors, large shops with glassed showcases, stylish barrel-vaulted metal roofing, and their new construction materials such as steel beams – they corresponded more to the modern arcades than to the image of the old narrow, dark bazaars. The Sūq al-Ḥamīdiyya is a good example of this new style of commercial building (see figs. 4, 5). In this almost straight bazaar street, nearly 450m long, the 8.70m to 9.90m distance between the two rows of shops is much wider than in a conventional sūq. The structure of the façades is regular for hundreds of meters. The shops are much more spacious than before, when they were not meant to be entered – the customer was served by the shopkeeper while standing outside. Now the window displays and showcases of glass tempted the client to come in. Several shops had a second-floor storeroom while others were open on two floors. The traditional, mainly plain or gabled wooden roofing was replaced by huge barrel-vaulted wooden constructions in the 1870s and 1880s. Later, after a devastating fire in 1912, these were succeeded, by order of the governor Nāẓim Pasha, by the barrel-vaulted metal roofing that we know today (see fig. 5).  

Plan 1: Wakālat al-‘Ashshā, ground plan, ground floor and first floor

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It was not only the bazaar streets themselves that were changed. The organization of the whole commercial district altered as well. No new baths (khâns) were built. Instead, a type of wakâla appeared for the first time, which was different in function to the khâns. Changes in transportation, especially the introduction of steamboats and trains, meant that huge storage capacities were no longer needed. The little storage rooms of the shops in the second story of the modern suqs provided sufficient space. The new style hotels at Marja Square, some of them with commercial and storage units, such as the building of Ahmad 'Izzat Pasha al-‘Abid (1851-1924), drew the former clients of the khâns for overnight stays. Consequently the wakâlas from the turn of the century do not have the function of depots or of hotels. They were built specifically as shopping malls, and have very small courtyards, modern façades, and glass-fronted shops (see plan 1).

But who built the new commercial buildings? Who changed the shape, function, and style of suqs and khâns in order to correspond to shifts in the trade systems and new tastes? Who modernized the commercial center of the city? In my survey of more than fifty suqs, khâns, and wakâlas built or rebuilt in this period, I could find no traces of building activity by foreigners. All these buildings (except banks) were erected by Ottoman governors, administrative councils, or local individuals. In the following pages I will provide some examples to demonstrate who was involved and how these changes happened.

The municipality and the Sûq al-Ḥamidiyya

Some governors, such as Midhat Pasha (1878-80) were especially active in remaking the commercial center. He built the long and widened suq, which bears his name, Sûq Midhat Pasha. This 470m-long bazaar street was directly to the north of the old Straight Street, a street-piercing measure designed to align this central axis of the street (the ancient Via Recta). Furthermore, he enlarged the Sûq al-Buzûrîyya and framed both bazaar streets with modern façades. Some of the shop furnishings of the late nineteenth century are still there, and provide an image of the original suq. On the other hand, the new institution of the municipality (al-majlis al-baladi) played an important role in creating the modern texture of the city. The municipality was introduced in Damascus following the provincial reforms of 1864. This modern urban institution, consisting of elected members of the public, was responsible among others things for urban planning, based largely on new principles. Owing to Ottoman yearbooks (sähnâme) we are well

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informed as to who was elected to this council.9 Unlike in Istanbul, Alexandria, or Jerusalem, the municipality of Damascus was not controlled directly or indirectly by foreign interests or non-Ottomans.10 By law only an Ottoman subject of at least 30 years, who was not employed in a foreign institution, had full civil rights, and only a citizen who paid a yearly tax of at least 100 ghirsh on his property had the right to put himself forward as a candidate for the municipal elections.11 The sālnāmes indicate that the 142 persons who were elected members of the municipality between 1871 and 1900 originated from about a hundred different Damascus families. It appears that no foreigner sat on the council during this time. This is an important consideration for the modernization of Damascus’ urban structures such as the sūq.

The enormous and famous Sūq al-Ḥamidiyya, for example, was erected due to this publicly elected council of urban notables. Its eastern part was started in 1301/1883-1884 and was finished in 1304/1886 or 1889 when it was first covered by a barrel-vaulted wooden roof and connected the narrow Sūq al-Jaḍīd with the Sūq al-Miskiyyya next to the Umayyad Mosque. It was cut through a former residential quarter as a street-piercing measure. The Sūq al-Ḥamidiyya and other new commercial buildings - such as wakālas or smaller sūqs branching off the Sūq al-Ḥamidiyya - were erected on house plots. The new bazaar street was a very significant urban project, because now the old city center of the Umayyad Mosque in the east was connected with the sūqs of the new city center at Marja Square in the west. It was not only members of the municipality who seem to have been involved in the planning process of the sūq, but members of other families as well.

The Mardam Bek family, one of the most important families of the time, erected several modern-style commercial buildings close to the citadel.12 Among them are the Sūq al-

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9 The Ottoman yearbooks for the province of Damascus exist in 32 volumes between the years 1285/1868-1869 and 1318/1900-1901. It lists among many other things some undertakings of this council and its members.


11 In the al-Shām newspaper, 74 (Rajab 27, 1315/1897). Every male Ottoman subject of at least 25 years, with impunity and all rights, and who paid a yearly tax of at least 50 ghirsh on his property had the right to vote. See also Kark, “The Jerusalem Municipality,” 123; PRO (FO 618-3 / April 6.4.1903). For every polling a special council was set up to control the elections. Compare al-Shām, 73 (Rajab 21, 1315/1897).

Būrūṣ/Suq al-ʿAṣrūniyya al-Jādīd and Suq Mardam Bek/al-Ṭahhān on the northern side of the Suq al-Ḥamidiyya and two wakālas on the southern side. It is interesting to note that private houses and a graden had previously stood where the Mardam Bek buildings were located. A court record of 1286/1869 mentions two houses of Muḥammad Mardam Bek and his son, ʿUthmān Mardam Bek and a garden of the Kīlānī waqf rented by the Mardam Bek family, exactly in this location. This is why the plots of the eastern Suq al-Ḥamidiyya are not as regular as one might expect from such new-drawn planning. The edges of the commercial buildings most probably recall those of the houses and the garden (see fig. 4). The brothers ʿAlī (1225/1810-1305/1887) and ʿUthmān Mardam Bek (1235/1820-1820 - 1304/1886-1887) were two of the most important figures at that time and were among other members of the highest administrative council of the province, the majlis al-idāra.

It seems that the Mardam Bek family were involved in the planning of the Suq al-Ḥamidiyya in cooperation with the municipality. Certainly they could expect high profits from commercial buildings here in the largest suq of Damascus, which became even more prominent in 1894. In that year the western part of the Suq al-Ḥamidiyya – first known as the Suq al-Jādīd – was opened to the public. To allow the construction of this new suq, the older Suq al-Jādīd, which ran parallel to the southern side of the citadel, was torn down and the moat in between was filled. Here, unlike in the eastern Suq al-Ḥamidiyya, it then became possible to lay out the plots of land for the shops in a regular manner. In this way the impressive suq, which was named after Sultan Abdūlhamid II, was completed before the turn of the century on Damascus initiative.

The Suq al-Ḥamidiyya had an enormous impact on the city and its new layout, recalling contemporary arcades, and became the model for other suqs. Possibly the longest shopping arcade in the world at the turn of the century, it is an impressive example of the successful modification of a classical urban institution in the light of modernity. This change in design and redefinition of commercial buildings must have been a conscious effort. The famous journalist Khalil Sarkis (1258/1842-1333/1915) wrote proudly in 1898 comparing to contemporary buildings in Europe: “The suqs of Damascus are so...
Fig. 1: Urban growth between 1850 and 1918
Fig. 2: Public buildings and infrastructure at the Marja Square 1918
Fig. 3: New and modernized suqs between 1875 and 1915

- New and renewed commercial buildings
- New and renewed commercial buildings by private initiative
- Unchanged commercial buildings

Legend:
1. Ṣūq ʿAlī Pasha
2. Ṣūq al-Khayl
3. Ṣūq al-ʿAṣīq
4. Ṣūq al-Jināl
5. Ṣūq al-Zarāḥāyya
6. Ṣūq al-Surūjyya
7. Ṣūq al-Khūja
8. Ṣūq al-Qurnayla
9. Ṣūq Darwīš Pasha
10. Ṣūq al-Hamīdīyya / al-Jadīd
11. Ṣūq al-Hamīdīyya
12. Ṣūq al-Bāṣīr / Mirdas Hek / al-Taḥḥānī
13. Ṣūq al-Naṣrī
14. Ṣūq al-Qudūrī
15. Ṣūq al-Misākyya
16. Ṣūq al-Qubāʾīqīyya
17. Ṣūq al-Qawwālīn
18. Ṣūq al-Sāgha
19. Ṣūq al-Qāhānī
20. Ṣūq al-Dābūrīyya
21. Ṣūq al-Khāyūfīn
22. Ṣūq Mīḥāt Pasha
Fig. 5: Sūq al-Ḥamīdiyya (collection Lemke)

Fig. 6: Sūq 'Alī Pasha (collection Weber)
Fig. 7: Sūq al-Qishānī

Fig. 8: Sūq al-Khūja
(source: IFAPO)
Fig. 9: Ottoman flagged steamboat and the Bosphorus in Bayt al-Qabbānī (~ upper middle class)

Fig. 10: Image of Istanbul in Bayt Dayrī / Murtādā (~ lower middle class)
famous for their dimensions and beauty, that some high European politicians claimed, that their like does not exist in their countries.  

The first modern suq: the suq of ‘Ali Pasha

During the 1880s and 1890s the municipality also remodeled other suqs, such as the Sūq al-Surūjiyya, the Sūq al-Khayil, and the Sūq al-‘Atiq. Others, such as the suq al-Khūqa, al-Qishānī, ‘Ali Pasha, or al-Qudsī, have their origins in private initiative only. The very first bazaar of a new type was built by ‘Ali Pasha. Previously destroyed, the building measured 50m in length and it is known from some rare historical photographs (see fig. 6) and from its original donation document (waqfīyya). Concerning the waqfīyya, the Sūq ‘Ali Pasha was endowed in 1292/1875 by Muhammad ‘Ali Pasha ibn Ismā‘īl ibn Muhammad al-Mūrahli as waqf aḥli. Like the later Sūq al-Hamidiyya, the Sūq ‘Ali Pasha had an important urban function in connecting the Marja Square with the square of Sūq al-Khayil and brought the new town center within the commercial life of the city.

The waqfīyya gives us a detailed picture of what the suq looked like. It was the first in Damascus to have elaborate façades on two stories, framing a wide and rectangular street with large shops. This layout then became standard for all suqs that were built in the following decades. Most probably these suqs were inspired by the new European-style arcades that were introduced in Istanbul around 1870 and matched the traditional Ottoman commercial buildings (sūq, arasta, bedesten, çarşı) perfectly.

In Damascus a local Ottoman official initiated the first shopping street with a modern layout. ‘Ali Pasha al-Mūrahli (d. before 1881) held one of the most prestigious positions in the administration as trustee for the gifts to Mecca and Medina during the pilgrimage.

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16 The Suq al-‘Atiq burned partially down in 1265/1849. See As‘ad al-Uṣūrānī, al-Shaykh Muhammad Sa‘īd al-Uṣūrānī: Masḵāhīd wa-aḥdāth dimashqiyyya fi mutasaf al-qarn al-tā‘īf ‘ashar, 1256-1277 k., 1840-1861m., Damascus 1994, 146. The horse market (Sūq al-Khayil) was moved outside the town in 1893-1894 and both Sūqs (al-Khayil, al-‘Atiq) widely changed. See, for these changes Sühneme 2.(1306/1888-1889) 146, 22(1307-1308/1890-1891) 155, 23(1310-1311/1893-1894) 261 f. See for these suqs Weber, "Marğa-Platz," nos. 36, 37, 39.

17 See for this suq MWT (MSk) S670/W106 (1252/1875) [waqfīyya], S731/W155 (1298/1881), S1038/W128 (1314/1896); Weber, "Marğa-Platz," no. 35.

18 The most famous of the arcades in Istanbul (Beyoğlu’Pera) are presumably the Çiçek Pasajı (Cité de Pera, 1876) or the Avrupa Pasajı (Aynalı Pasajı, 1871-1872). One should note here that the European arcades were of course strongly inspired by the bazaar streets. See for the origin of European arcades, Geist, Passagen, 40 ff.
(ṣurra amīn al-ḥaff). Court records throughout the nineteenth century prove that the Mūralīs, who had been known in Damascus since the sixteenth century, lived in the city quarter of al-Qanawāt.

Different patterns can be distinguished in the modernizing of the bazaars of Damascus, reflecting the circumstances of ownership and building plots. The impressive Sūq al-Qudsi consists of three streets in an F-shape with a total length of approximately 120m that includes the Ottoman Bank. For this building the Qudsis – as did the Mardam Bek in the case of the Sūq al-Hamidiyya some decades earlier – probably changed the parcel of their dwelling into a commercial used plot in 1912. During the process of reconstruction shortly after the big fire of 1912, which had destroyed many buildings between the Sūq al-ʿAṣrūniyya and Bāb al-Bārīd, the Qudsis and other individuals such as a certain Mr. al-ʿAshshā and al-Murādī undertook the erection of wakālas. The attraction of the new bazaar district around the Sūq al-Hamidiyya must have been enormous.

Changing a waqf: the Sūq al-Qishānī

Other buildings apart from houses were converted to commercial use. The Ḥamnām al-Qishānī (981/1573-1574), which belonged to the waqf of the famous governor Darwish Pasha (d. 987/1579), provides a good example of functional changes. Court records give

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21 The Ottoman Bank was erected in 1313/1895 and enlarged shortly after 1908. See Banque Impériale Ottomane (Istanbul), Comité de direction (CDFV) 13, 16 février 1906, 14, PV 30 sept 1907; 14, 22 oct 1907; 14, 18 août 1908; 14, 12 oct 1908; 15, 27 jan 1908; PRO (FO 618-3/ 30.4.1912); Weber, “Zougness,” 181 ff., catalogue no. 49.

22 A court record mentions a house at the Sūq Bāb al-Qulʿa, which is the same spot, and neighboring real estates that were bought by Saʿīd al-Qudsi from his uncle Muhāji ʿl-Dīn al-Qudsi in 1296/1878. See MWT (MSH) S724/W184 (1296/1878). Maps and panoramas photographs before 1912 show only houses at this place.

23 The British consul reports that the fire started on April 26, 1912 in the Khān al-Murādī and destroyed the area between Bāb al-Bārīd and Sūq al-ʿAṣrūniyya comprising 370 shops, 4 khānas, 40 houses, 3 money changers’ offices, and I mosque. PRO (FO 618-3/ April 30, 1912), (FO 618-3/ Oct 2, 1912).
information about how the tenants of this waqf, Ḥāfiz Efendi al-Khārbūṭli and Shafaṭqa Khānum al-Ārdūmī, developed the idea of changing the public bath, out of service since 1905, into a sūq (see fig. 7). Backed by a legal certificate (fatwā) of Mufid Muhammad Ṣāliḥ Qatanā they argued that in order to pay the rent to the waqf administration and to pursue the interests (maslahā) of the waqf the function of the building needed to be changed. Following this, a council of experts was set up by the waqf administration, consisting of the two carpenters Muhammad ibn Aḥmad al-Tawwām and Saʿīd ibn Kamāl Aṣfār and the architect Khawāja Ḥabīb al-Mīmārī ibn Lutfī Qarwashān who studied the case in 1324/1906. They confirmed the bad condition of the building and recommended it be changed into a sūq. After the case was decided positively and a request for ratification (barāt/barāra) sent to Istanbul, the Ḥammām al-Qīshānī was rebuilt in a fashionable modern style as the Sūq al-Qīshānī and opened to the public twelve months later.24

Copying the Sūq al-Hamidiyya: the sūq of Rāghib al-Khūja

Most of the sūqs intra muros were only enlarged and remodeled. Patrons had few opportunities to acquire appropriate plots of land for new buildings, and as a result they often had to change the function of structures instead, as seen in the case of the residences of the Mardam Beks, Qudsis, and that of the Sūq al-Qīshānī. The direct surroundings of the citadel with its non-functioning, partially filled moats provided an exceptional opportunity, as mentioned above, with the municipality taking the initiative to enlarge and rebuild the Sūq al-Jadīd, transforming it into the western part of the Sūq al-Hamidiyya. Here, next to the citadel, private individuals were active too. The Sūq Naṣrī was erected above filled-in eastern moat around 1910, most probably through the initiative of a certain Bāshir Naṣrī.

The impressive 140m-long Sūq al-Khūja already occupied the western moat (see fig. 8).25 This sūq was built in two stages by Rāghib al-Khūja and his partner Bishāra Efendi Aṣfār on the model of the Sūq al-Hamidiyya. The southern main building (the Sūq al-Khūja al-Barrānī) was started in 1313/1895-1896. The northern part (the Sūq al-Khūja

24 See, for this legal case, MWT (MSH) S1275/W144 (1323/1906), S1275/W133 (1324/1906). For further information on the sūq MWT (MSH) S1378/W51 (1327/1909); al-Munajjid, Wujūl Dimashq, 6, fn. 1; Sack, Damascus, No. 4.32; Akrām al-Ulbī, Khiṣfa Dimashq: ð[ašt] türkîȳa skmîa, Damascus 1989, 461, 530; Karl Wutzinger and Carl Wutzinger, Damascus, die islamische Stadt, Berlin 1924, B/4-6.
25 This corresponds to the dimensions of the 153m-long Friedrichstraßepassage (1908-1909) and 128.75m-long Kaisergalerie (1871-1873) in Berlin and the total original length of 157.50m of the Passage in The Hague (1883-1885). See Geist, Passagen, 133, 143 f., 173, 176.
al-Juwwānī) was completed in 1323/1905. Its Damascene owner, Rāghiib ibn Ṣāhid ibn Muḥammad al-Khūja, worked in the military administration (al-dā‘ira al-‘askariyya al-sultāniyya). Like ʻAlī Pashaal-Mūrāhli (Sūq ʻAlī Pasha) he lived in the city quarter of al-Qanawāt. His house, which we found with the help of court records, was by 1883 mentioned by al-Qāyyūfī as one of the most lavishly decorated residences in the town.27

In his enterprises he could most probably count on the help of his brother Māhμūd Efendī al-Khūja, who was president of the municipality when the sūq was erected (1316/1898-1899 and 1317/1899-1900).28 Rāghiib al-Khūja’s partner, Bilhāra Asfār, had also established close contacts with the local administration. He worked as dragoman for the German consul and merchant Ernst Lätticke (1843-1904) and after his death even acted as administrator for the German imperial consulate. During his many years in German service (from 1877 to 1910) he became well known to the decision makers of the city.29 It is likely that Rāghiib al-Khūja was only able to gain access to the attractive building plots next to the citadel and to carry out this enormous building project due to his own position and those of his brother and his partner.

Private initiative: schools and other public buildings

It is interesting to note how many of these modern sūqs were constructed through individual initiative. Some, but not all, of those elected as local members of the Ottoman councils became active in urban construction. Other buildings for public use, such as hotels, restaurants, cafés, and mosques were erected through the private initiative of

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26 The history of this building, which was demolished in 1403/1982-1983, can be reconstructed due to court records and historical photographs. See NWT (Msh) S1232/W3 (1320/1902); S1378/W3 (1327/1909). For further information see al-Husnī, Muntakhabat al-tawārikh, I, 278; Sack, Damaskus, 41, 58, 5:14; Schrader, "Sūq von Damaskus," 287, Tab. 64b; al-Shīhābī, Arwāq Dimashq, 213, 219 f.; al-Ulabī, Khitaq Dimashq, 462; Weber, "Marqā-Platz," no. 38; Weber, "Zeugnisse," 166 ff., catalogue no. 208.


28 Māhμūd was elected into the Damascene municipality in 1315/1898 by 572 votes and in 1327/1909 by 508 votes. See, for Māhμūd Efendī al-Khūja, al-Husnī, Muntakhabat al-tawārikh, II, 907 f.; al-Muqtabas, 68 (17. Safar 1327/1909); al-Qāyyūfī, Naṣīḥat al-bāshām, 127; Sālānī, Sālānī, 125, 128 (1317/1899-1900); al-Shām, 85 (24. Shawwāl 1315/1898).

29 Bihāra Asfār was decorated several times with German medals and represented the German consul and the vice-consul of Austria-Hungary if he was absent. See, for Bihāra Asfār, AA (141505, Aug. 5, 1890), (141505, Aug. 2, 1894 to Aug. 14, 1894), (141505, Dec. 8, 1898), (141505, May 12, 1899-Oct. 16, 1899), (141505, April 21, 1901-April 2, 1902), (141505, Feb. 8, 1904-March 22, 1904), (141506, Aug. 1, 1908-Nov. 24, 1908), (141506, April 6, 1910). Sālānī, Sālānī, (1302/1884-1885) 98, 99 (1303/1885-1886) 83, 84 (1304/1886-1887) 72. For Lätticke see: Weber, "Zeugnisse," 66 ff.
ordinary Damascene citizens. Private schools in particular bear witness of the Damascenes desire to reform and modernize their city and society.

Schools are of major importance to social and intellectual change, and are catalysts of modernization. Many schools were founded by missionaries (at least 12) or local Christian communities, with or without foreign aid (at least 13). Other educational institutions were founded by the state (at least 15), which increased the number of its schools especially in the period of AbdUlhamid. The missionary school al-Madrasa al-Azariyya of the Sœurs de Charité in Bāb Tūmā and the first government secondary school, Maktab ‘Anbar, were of particular importance. Both establishments played a distinctive role in the creation of a new intellectual elite.

In addition to the many missionary and state schools one has to mention the semigovernmental society of the Jamī‘yaa Khayriyya li-Inshā’ al-Madāris (at least 15 schools) and the many private schools (madāris ahliyya, at least 15). The latter were mainly founded by religious scholars who did not consider educational reform to be fast enough and opened schools with new curricula in private houses or ruined waqf buildings. This movement is a very interesting demonstration of the local will to reform. The most prominent of these madāris ahliyya was the Madrasa al-Uthmāniyya, founded by the Shaykh Kâmil al-Qaṣṣāb (1873-1954) in 1329/1911 in the Dār al-Qurān wa’l-Ḥadīth al-Tankiziyah (728/1327). Important persons of the Damascene Nahda such as ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Inkīlīzī (1878-1916) or ‘Ārif al-Shīhābī (1889-1916) were teaching here. Thus the modernization of urban institutions carried out by local individuals was not limited to the sūqs. This, of course, gives us no information on individual or collective


identities, but it emphasises the fact that Damascene society, or at least part of it, shared actively or even initiated the reorganization of this Middle Eastern society and its urban structures in the late Ottoman period.

The role of foreigners in reshaping Damascus

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the number of foreigners residing in the city was small, unlike Beirut or Istanbul. John Bowring remarked in 1840 that “the European costume is scarcely ever seen; and, with few exemptions, I believe the Frank settlers have adopted the Syrian dress.” Some establishments were opened by non-Damascenes, for example a certain Ottoman-Greek (?) called Khawâja Dimitri al-Lûkânadjî ibn al-Khâwâja Jûrî ibn Dimitri Izniç, whose family owned the first hotel in Damascus and a modern café at Marja Square. Except for the missionary institutions one can find only a very few building of foreign origin such as the German Palestine Bank, which opened a branch in the Sûq al-Aṣrûnîyya next to the citadel in 1910, but the director of the bank, Timotheus Wurst, only lived in Damascus for a few years.

Following the Tanzimat and the provincial reforms of 1864 foreign influence still remained limited. The British consul mentioned in 1870 that after the riots of 1860 only 20 foreigners were living in the town. At the same time 4,000 foreigners were permanently living in Beirut. Qasâṭîlî records in 1879 around 350 and Sâmî Bek in 1890 around 400 non-Ottoman subjects in Damascus. A lot of them must have been protégés of consulates and individuals from the Balkans, Persia or North Africa. According to the Kölnische Zeitung the German community was in 1912 the largest among those of the Europeans and counted some 40 individuals. In 1912 Hicke stressed what he saw as the non-foreign character of the town:

34 This person is mentioned in MWT (MSH) S1275/W126 (1323/1905), for the two buildings, see Weber, "Marja-Platz," nos. 22, 46.
Wurst, born 1874 in Jaffa, held as well the post of the Dutch vice-consul and in 1913 became German consul for a short time. After the death of Ernst Lüttiske, Wurst was the only German in Damascus for several years. In 1914 he left Damascus to become the director of the German Palestine Bank in Baghdad. See AA (R141505, May 31, 1905), (R141505, Dec. 18, 1905), (R141506, 11.11.1906 until April 10, 1907), (R141506, March 17, 12), (R141505, Jan. 14, 1914), (R141506, June 2, 1914).
31 Schachtowski Schilcher, Families in Politics, 68, fn. 37.
33 Kölnische Zeitung, 619, (June 1, 1912).
...still thoroughly Oriental, Cairo has become horribly official and cosmopolitan; Algiers and Tunis are very French; Jerusalem is the home of religious sects; Beirut contains numbers of Italians, Maltese, Greeks, and Americans; but the fez prevails in the streets and bazaars of Damascus, where once, during a four-hour walk through the principal quarters, I did not meet one man who was not an Eastern or see one house which looked European. Even the trams...scarcely interfere with the Eastern atmosphere.  

At the beginning of the twentieth century some foreign experts, such as P. Apéry, were employed by the authorities. Apéry was the highest municipal engineer at the turn of the century. But the number of these experts remained limited until at least World War I. A modern Ottoman Damascus developed with little direct foreign influence and is therefore an important case study for investigating the change of a society and its urban organization in the period of reform. But how many people were involved in this process and how much self-awareness did the people of Damascus have when remodeling their city? Another urban architectural feature that may help us here is the private house, built more or less entirely by private initiative.

The new lifestyle

This reorganization of an entire Arab metropolis, its urban fabric, its architecture and a large part of its social organization is clearly visible in this most private aspect of urban architecture. Houses were extensively build or reconstructed during this time. Certainly a new era calls for a new style and the continuous building activities allowed the integration of new ideas. During this enormous reshaping of the city it was possible to rebuild in the latest fashion and to adopt new techniques of construction and decoration.

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31 See for example Sâhinâme §(1899-1900) 125. The engineers of the municipality were mainly of Arab-Ottoman origin. Only a very few non-Arab names are given, such as Wâsiyâddî Efendi as second engineer. See Jaridat al-Shâm, 93 (27, Dhu l-Hijja 1315/1898); Sâhinâme 2(1315/1897-1898) 99, Sâhinâme §(1317/1899-1900) 98. And a certain Monsieur Bursâl was a member of the office of engineers of the municipality. See Sâhinâme §(1298/1880-1881) 84. During World War I Jamâl Pasha employed some foreign experts such as Max Zürcher, Karl Wulzinger, Theodor Wiegand, Mr. Mühlnes, Mr. Salz, Mr. Wilbusch-Witseh and Mr. Stöckle. The architect Fernando de Aranda (1873-1969), who lived his entire life in Syria and Turkey and who was of Spanish origin, drew the plans for some important buildings. See, for de Aranda, Eugenio García Gascón, "El arquitecto español Fernando de Aranda (1878-1969) en Damasco," Awdâq Estudios sobre el Mundo arabe e islámico contemporáneo, 9 (1988), 67-100. For all the names mentioned here Weber, "Zeugnisse," 88 f.
32 See, for the changes of houses in late Ottoman Damascus so far, S. Weber, "Images of Imagined Worlds, Self-image and Worldview in Late Ottoman Wall Paintings," in The Empire in the City: Arab Provincial Capitals in the Late Ottoman Empire, ed. J. Hansen, T. Philipp and S. Weber, Beenumer Texte und Studien vol. 88, Beirut 2002. More than three-quarters of the roughly 600 houses investigated during my survey were substantially rebuilt or were entirely new in this period. This corresponds to official numbers.
There is much to say about the layout and decoration of houses, which underwent significant changes and became closer to Istanbul models than ever before. With the central-hall house an entirely new house type was imported into Damascus from the Ottoman century.42

The depiction of “star and crescent” became widespread. In many houses belonging to Muslim, Christian, or Jewish merchants, scholars, officials, and others, one can find this Ottoman emblem in architectural decoration. The same holds true for military armor and the sultanic emblem (fugha). This phenomenon is not seen before the Tanzimat period, nor were any official rules issued concerning the decoration of houses. Yet there was apparently a common idea of how an Ottoman citizen of that time would build his home. An investigation of the architectural decoration helps to reconstruct some aspects of this notion. Wall paintings in particular are very informative.43 The most frequently painted motifs are imaginary views of the Bosporus or of the capital itself. All over Damascus one finds imagined images of the Bosporus. The sheer number of pictures provides evidence that the Bosporus was a motif with a very special meaning.

The “sweet waters of Asia,” the area around the Güzelsu and KüçükSu rivers next to the Bosporus, became for European travelers in the nineteenth century a byword for the Ottoman high life. In Ottoman literary life on the Bosporus was often celebrated. The images in the wall paintings give an idea of the place and a certain feeling of a time that everybody can recognize and connect to. It represents a way of life, probably adopted by most citizens of Damascus who had wall paintings in their houses. This might explain

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why one finds the same view of the capital in nearly all wall paintings in Damascus in such a limited period of time (c. 1820-1915). Moreover, the Bosporus is always depicted crowded with ships – and from the 1830s onwards with steamboats. Damascus is not a harbor town, thus ships were not a part of everyday life. The hundreds of ships featured in wall paintings in Damascus are nearly always flagged with the Ottoman banner, as are the military buildings beside the water (see fig. 9). There are many imaginary mosques always easy to distinguish as being Ottoman.

From these paintings one can suppose that many people in Damascus did not have any particular problems in connecting symbols of Ottoman identity to their homes. Arab nationalism, at that time still restricted to a small part of the intellectual elite, did not yet find an expression in the material culture of the city. All other aspects of Damascene interior decoration point in the same direction of an Ottoman identity. A new style of decoration, usually featuring motifs with the star and crescent, was common in nearly all houses of that period. Modernization mainly reached Damascus via Istanbul, which orientated the “modern Damascene mind” in that direction. The Ottoman capital was the main source of inspiration and symbols of modernization, like the steamboats in the Bosporus, flying the Ottoman flag.

Architectural decoration also gave evidence of an awareness of a new time, parallel to the time people in Istanbul or Europe were living and acting in. For example, one can find wall paintings in Damascus depicting events that happened in Europe, which is a creation of simultaneity and is a direct connection between the local realm and the world ‘outside’.

Conclusion

When examining the material culture of Damascus at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries one can state that the often-mentioned stagnation, or even decline, in urban societies under late Ottoman rule does not hold for Damascus, one of the classical cities of the Islamic world. The modern sūq and many other institutions in Damascus were not only the product of high-ranking Ottoman officials in Istanbul seeking to impose their desire for modernization on a reactionary and alien local society, nor were they initiated by a detached community of foreign missionaries and merchants. It is often said how important foreign influence was to the process of reshaping Middle Eastern cities such as Beirut, Cairo, Alexandria, Izmir, or Istanbul in the nineteenth century. This is certainly true, but not for the whole picture. The role of local urban societies in this process is generally underestimated. Damascus provides an example of how the modernization of an entire classical Islamic urban center was carried out by the Ottoman administration, and especially by the citizens of this town.
Regarding the buildings themselves, one can discern two main tendencies. On the one hand, traditional urban building types (such as the khāns and suqās) were adapted to the new time. The new suqās, for example the Sūq al-Hamidiyya, were an outcome of an effort by people from Damascus to modernize their city and commercial buildings, such as the Wakālat al-‘Ashshā, and testifies that this is not only a question of taste. On the other hand, architectural decoration and comments to these buildings give us an idea of how the inhabitants of Damascus perceived themselves at that time. Obviously, many people in Damascus found access to the modern world through their identity as citizens of the Ottoman Empire. It seems that many people in Damascus considered themselves an integral part of the Ottoman Empire and the modern world. One reason for this was most probably that it could provide a specific role or a particular position in the modern world, which was drawing closer. Direct contacts and travels, personal anecdotes, books, postcards, newspapers, new curricula in schools all gave an idea of the world outside Damascus and the Ottoman Empire. One can observe a clear tendency towards a modern Ottoman character of town and society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries on many different levels (clothing, housing, public life, administrative and urban organization, training, etc.). Many people in Damascus displayed symbols of Ottoman identity in their private architecture and dress. The initiative in reshaping modern Ottoman institutions (except administrative buildings) - as seen in houses, schools, and commercial buildings - came from local individuals and administrative councils rather than governors. Modern public spaces were created, such as the new suqās or the new town center of the Marja Square with its parks, coffeehouses, and theaters (mainly initiated by the municipality or private individuals). Most Damascenes rebuilt their houses along the same modernizing Ottoman lines. Modernism and Ottomanism were closely connected. Ottoman symbols were deliberately displayed in houses all over the town and combined with diverse symbols of the modern world: steam-boats, factories, railways, and, later on, aeroplanes. Even in the intimacy of their homes, in their salons and vestibules, Damascenes displayed themselves as Ottoman citizens of the modern world.