

The first project: Documentation in the North Syrian Limestone Massif

1971. Departure for Syria

After studying Classical Archaeology and Ancient History for many years, I had taken up a second degree, inspired by a stay in Istanbul in 1965. These weeks in the former Byzantine capital had impressed me so deeply that I began to study Byzantine history and archaeology in Munich after my return: Instead of Central Europe as the ‘navel of the world’, the juxtaposition of Europe and the Near East had become decisive for me.

My first post-doctoral project was termed *“Use of Photogrammetry and Data Processing in the Documentation of Extensive Architectural Inventories”* and was funded by the Stiftung zur Förderung der Wissenschaften in Bayern for one year. Its focus was the North Syrian Limestone Massif with its exceptionally well-preserved buildings of the 1st to 7th centuries AD.

The first photographs of buildings in the Limestone Massif were part of the publication of numerous buildings of northern and southern Syria after the expeditions of Princeton University, led by Howard Crosby Butler⁷. The next major stage in the exploration of the Limestone Massif was the three-volume publication by Georges Tchalenko: *“Villages antiques de la Syrie du Nord”* – an exemplary appraisal of all aspects of this rich cultural landscape⁸.

In 1971 I contacted Georges Tchalenko, the director of the ‘Mission Archéologique de Haute Syrie’, presented my project and was invited, together with Alexander Wetzig, a student of architecture, to participate in a follow-up campaign in 46 settlements of the Limestone Massif. The plan was to improve and expand the photo documentation for Tchalenko’s second major publication: *“Églises syriennes à bêma”*⁹.

The prodigious experiences of this trip to all regions of the mountain massif made a big impact on me. The number of preserved churches, houses, tombs was overwhelming (Pl. 5. 7a. b) and considerably more extensive than the publications had led me to expect. I realized that the application of any method of data processing should be preceded by an exemplary overall inventory of at least one settlement. I therefore submitted the findings for a description system in German, English and French to the foundation and began planning the comprehensive survey of a settlement with Georges Tchalenko, under his direction

and connected to the Institut Français. He had already prepared a topographical general plan for three settlements with floor plans of the individual buildings. For one of the sites, all tangible buildings on the ground were to be surveyed using photogrammetry, complemented by partial excavations, and documented with analytical descriptions in a general representation.

When it however became apparent in 1972, that the planned comprehensive survey of a settlement would not be realized as a French-German collaboration and under the direction of George Tchalenko, I elaborated a project for the study of capital sculpture in the churches of the 4th to 6th centuries in the North Syrian Limestone Massif on the basis of the experiences gained in 1971.

In the 1970s there was no department of the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut in Syria. The Institut Français in Beirut was the centre for all on going as well as planned archaeological activities in Syria and Lebanon. It is necessary here for me to describe the situation I encountered in 1971 and to briefly discuss the political events before and after the foundation of the Institute.

The Founding of the Institut Français and the years after Syrian Independence

Calls for Syrian independence in the years following the end of World War I came to a temporary halt after the defeat of the Syrian army by French mandate troops at Maysalun, the exile of King Faysal and the violent suppression of the ensuing uprisings. The League of Nations recognized the French mandate over Syria and Lebanon in 1922. In 1929, Henri Seyrig was appointed Directeur Général des Antiquités de Syrie et du Liban. He interrupted his work in the Middle East during World War II with assignments in Mexico and America, before returning in 1945 for the founding of the Institut Français d'Archéologie de Beyrouth. In April 1946, the Syrian president declared Syria's independence.

The Institut Français was now legally subordinate to the Commission of Antiquities in Damascus, but all decisions on archaeological work in Syria continued to be coordinated with the Institut Français. It was Henri Seyrig, first director of the Service des Antiquités en Syrie et au Liban and then director of the Institut Français in Beirut (1945–1967), who with his all-embracing tolerance and foresight promoted archaeological missions of various nations over many years: the mission of the Belgians in Apamea, the British in Bosra, the Danes in Hama, the Germans in Tell Halaf. In 1934 he entrusted Georges Tchalenko, an emigrated Russian architect, with restoration work at Qal'at Sim'an, Qalbloze, and numerous other sites in Syria.

A detailed biography and an account of the years of his father's collaboration with Henri Seyrig was published in 2019 by George Tchalenko's son¹⁰. I will mention only a few dates from the biography, which preceded his arrival in Syria: Georges Tchalenko, after his emigration in 1922, had gone to study architecture at the Technische Hochschule in Braunschweig. After graduation he collaborated on some projects with Alexander Klein, Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe, and in 1931, against all odds, he became the head of the design office of the Technische Hochschule Braunschweig. In 1933 he left Germany. In Jerusalem he then accepted Harald Ingholt's offer to work as an architect on the Danish excavation in Hama. As part of this project, he met Henri Seyrig in 1934 (Pl. 37b).

I return to the planning of the recordings in the Limestone Massif. In their publications not only Howard Crosby Butler, but also Jean Lassus and Georges Tchalenko had reported about the intensive robbing especially of capitals in northern and central Syria¹¹. Capitals could be easily removed from not too remote ruined sites, since they were accessible without excavation work (Pl. 7b). Because of their quality they were popular not only with private collectors and could be admired in Europe and also in America, in hotel reception halls or in gardens as table supports. After the impressions of the trip of 1971 with hundreds of capitals in the churches' debris, the research of such important evidence of the building decoration became urgently necessary.

The surveys in the mountain massif were to be preceded by the survey of Henri Pharaon's collection of capitals in Beirut. I had become acquainted with them in 1971 (Pl. 4). The 210 capitals of the collection were mainly from the Limestone Massif. In a letter to Henri Pharaon in 1973, I asked for permission to record the capitals of his collection. After his acceptance, I asked the Institut Français if Ernest Will would support an application to the Directorate General of Syrian Antiquities in Damascus for "*Untersuchungen zu den Kapitellen in den Kirchen des 4.–6. Jahrhunderts im Nordsyrischen Kalksteinmassiv*".

After a positive response from both sides, I submitted the application for "*Studien zu den Kapitellen in den Kirchen des 4.–6. Jahrhunderts im Nordsyrischen Kalksteinmassiv*" to the Directorate General of Syrian Antiquities, which was approved surprisingly quickly. My following application for a post-doctoral fellowship at the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft was approved in spring 1974. In April 1974 already, together with the photographer Helmut

As an Archaeologist in Syria

Loose, I shipped the VW bus out to Beirut with Turkish Maritime Lines, began the project in Beirut and prepared the first campaign in the Limestone Massif.

All capitals of the Pharaon collection were measured and photographed by Helmut Loose with 6 × 6 cameras in the spring of 1974. The photographer and I resided in a very good atmosphere at the German Oriental Institute and were spoiled by Henri Pharaon: cooked for every day by several cooks – classical Arabic, classical European, Russian – under the supervision of his major domus. With Helga Seeden from the American University, Beirut, we went to Tyros, Byblos and the Druze villages of Lebanon, with Georges Tchalenko to Damascus and Resafa.

Shortly before completing my capital surveys, Henri Pharaon asked me to accompany him to one of the storerooms of the largest antiquities' dealer in Beirut: A dozen basalt capitals had arrived, a type of capital missing from his collection. Before transporting them to Europe or America, he wanted to select some for his collection. In the large warehouse I experienced a shock: a great many capitals and barrier slabs, entire lintels, large floor mosaics cut into small squares – they were all looted from Syria. After saying to Pharaon "*all basalt capitals are good*", I turned around and left the hall. I did not suspect at the time that this shock was only the introduction to a long chain of experiences with antiquity theft in Syria.

For my surveys in the Limestone Massif these experiences with the large number of capitals in the collection and the confrontation with the excessive theft of antiquities in the warehouse at the port of Beirut were decisive: Some basalt capitals had to be bought quickly by Henri Pharaon to save them from being shipped to Europe. The work in the Pharaon collection was the best preparation for the surveys in the Limestone Massif. Collaborating with Helmut Loose, I was able to measure all the capitals and prepare short descriptions.

There had been a good atmosphere in the discussions with Ernest Will before my departure for Syria in 1974. My plans for the study of the capitals in the settlements of the mountain massif were favourably received, and my work schedule was not restricted in time nor in content. The lack of restrictions was perhaps due to the fact that Ernest Will, an outstanding classical archaeologist, was not aware of the exceedingly rich findings of building decoration in the Limestone Massif when I first began my work. The later problems with the In-

stitut Français undoubtedly had to do with my broad formulation of the work plan.

At a meeting with Henri Seyrig in 1972, Georges Tchalenko had told him about my project plans. I was invited by Seyrig to visit him and therefore went to Neuchâtel in October 1972 to present my project to him. Henri Seyrig described in detail and critically how all the sites of the Limestone Massif had become French Concession territory as a result of the work of Georges Tchalenko (Pl. 37a). I noted that this Concession would have to be changed according to the opinion of Seyrig and Tchalenko, but did not see it as a problem at that time, since I had come to Syria and to the French Institute through the contact with Tchalenko.

Other topics of conversation in Neuchâtel were Georges Tchalenko's second major publication on the "*Églises syriennes à bema*", churches with a special liturgical institution, the bema. Before my trip to Neuchâtel, I had read the just-finished text in Tchalenko's flat and seen the drawings, most of which had already been inked, as well as the photos planned for the third volume. Henri Seyrig was expecting the book to be published soon in 1972.

When surveying the churches with this liturgical furnishing, Tchalenko had also considered the capitals of individual buildings. It was clear that my work in churches without bema on the one hand and the research of the capitals recorded by Tchalenko on the other hand would be closely connected with the publication of the bema churches.

1973. Reorganization of the Mission archéologique de Haute Syrie; "retraite" of Tchalenko

On 21st January 1973, Henri Seyrig died unexpectedly. Georges Tchalenko had lost not only a long-time friend, but also his most important sponsor. Even after his work at the Institut Français had come to an end, Seyrig had remained in constant contact with Tchalenko and had followed the work on the bema book chapter by chapter.

The difficulties that began immediately after the death of Henri Seyrig had already announced themselves in 1972 with the plans for a reorganization of the Mission Archéologique de Haute Syrie and had increased until the dismissal of Georges Tchalenko. In June 1975, he was informed in an official letter: His contract with the Institut Français would end on 1st October 1975; until then, his archives were to be transferred to the Institute; only after this transfer would he

be paid his financial compensation after 40 years of work. Georges Tchalenko had had enough difficulties as a stateless person during the war and post-war period. Only in 1963 had his situation improved somewhat by obtaining Lebanese citizenship. However, he had not expected the removal of his archive, including his drawings and photographs for the book. His comment was: *"Il est normal, qu' on veuille se débarrasser de moi à mon âge, mais il est anormal, que l'on veuille me couper la possibilité de continuer mon oeuvre, en me privant de mes archives"* (letter of 10th June 1975). Helga Seeden from the American University in Beirut commented by letter on the following situation: *"Nachdem alles auf einen großen Lastwagen verladen war, sah es in der Wohnung aus wie auf einem Schlachtfeld."*

Edgar Baccache, trained for many years by Tchalenko as a draftsman, was given other duties at the Institut Français: Tchalenko had thus lost his last collaborator. This was a disaster for the press-ready preparation of the original drawings of the book and unfortunately also for the planned monograph of the Church of Qalbloze.

It was not the civil war in Lebanon that demanded the reorganization of the Mission archéologique de Haute Syrie, because this had already been planned in 1972. However, there is no doubt that the death of Henri Seyrig in 1973 and the catastrophic events of the civil war had an impact on the thirteen years leading up to Tchalenko's death. I report these events because they also changed my situation after 1973.

1974. First campaign in the Limestone Massif

Before Helmut Loose's return flight in June 1974, I drove with him to Bashmishli, which was to become my starting point for the work in the massif during the summer. The trip with Abu Feisal (Achmed Abd el Ghafour), the antiquities guard of Djebel Barisha and al-Ala led to Qalbloze and Qirqbize (Pl. 3). An asphalt road up to Qalbloze was under construction. A boulder placed at the border of the street after the blastings came loose and hit the rear of the VW bus as it was leaving – a huge blow. The car skidded and with a great deal of luck I managed to avoid falling down into the valley. This was the first event that immediately reminded me of Gertrude Bell and her account of the more than difficult climb up to the Basilica before the road was built: it was all tripping and jumping over boulders, always in danger of tumbling down the slopes into the valley¹². I had experienced my first climb in 1971 in exactly the same

manner, and I nonetheless wondered whether the asphalt road really brought an improvement.

August 1974, I set out again for Bashmishli. Right next to the house of the guardian of antiquities Abu Feisal, Georges Tchalenko had built a small one-room building in which he lived during his work in the central regions. I was able to rent this house and it was my little paradise during all my work in 1974 and 1975 in Djebel Barisha and al-Ala. The wonderful hospitality of the family of the guardian of the antiquities, his help in the selection of workers and the organization of mules, as well as the thoroughly friendly atmosphere of the whole village, still shape my memories of the first years of my work in the Limestone Massif.

At this point I come back to the travel report of Gertrude Bell: She was on horseback and partly on foot in the mountain massif and set up the tents following the route. More important to her than anything else were the contacts with all levels of the Syrian population. Her superior knowledge of the Arabic language made any conversation about everyday issues as well as political topics possible. Unfortunately, my knowledge of Arabic was only sufficient for short conversations during family visits or official meetings and especially for conversations with the workers who accompanied me. I had a central place of residence in each region, from which the work in other sites was organized. Most importantly, my stays were determined by intensive work in one or two buildings of each site and only short introductions to the elders of each place immediately after the arrival of our small group.

Despite these differences, I was more than familiar with Gertrude Bell's report, as the situation in the limestone massif had changed only slightly by the time I went there. The ruined villages with their olive and fig trees, small tobacco and grain fields enchanted me, had become places of longing. Everything as crystal clear as if there were no dust at all, every notch in the bluish limestone as fresh as if it had been created only yesterday and ready to receive countless small blossoms (Pl. 5a. b).

At the first cock-crow I went out into the olive grove, where with the toilet paper roll under my arm and a plastic bottle of water I visited the tree assigned to me as my morning toilet – my intestines needed some time to get used to this rite. After breakfast of tea, crusty fresh flatbread, brined cheese, olives and yogurt, the mules were loaded: my photo cases, the large photo boxes, some

tools, large bottles of water and the food for the workers, Abu Feisal and me. The hours before 8 a.m. were to be used for the walk to each of the ancient sites, because the heat set in already around 9 a.m.

My work in each church began with a plan that recorded the location of the individual capitals and other elements of the building decoration. Most of the capitals could be easily located in the ashlar limestone rubble, as they were not covered by earth or sand drifts. The workers were able to uncover the capitals, partially covered by ashlar, and shore them up with wooden beams to the extent that I could measure them and they could be moved for photographs. During the lunch break I prepared the work for the afternoon and tried to get an overview of the respective site and its buildings. The work could not as a rule be completed in one day, since its conclusion also included the reconstruction of the original find position of the capitals and a description of the doors and façade design of each church. Thus, the site of the previous day was often revisited on the way to the new site. The way back was always arduous with tired legs exhausted from going up and down the ashlar mountains.

The organization of Gertrude Bell's trip with tents and daily changing stations had largely corresponded to that of the Princeton Expedition team. I reached the individual places with my small team only after long walks – usually 10–15 and sometimes even 20–30 km round trip per day. But I also experienced the cultural landscape of the northern Syrian Limestone Massif without asphalt roads, on small mountain tracks and through inner plains (Pl. 5a). Nothing has changed the mountain massif as profoundly as the construction of numerous asphalt roads in the 80s of the 20th century – I'll come back to this later.

At the aforementioned meetings with the elders of a village, after exchanging pleasantries, I was able to have conversations about the family, possible illnesses and needed medicine. During all the stays after 1974, I then took as many aspirin tablets as possible, English fruit sweets in a tin, torches, sunglasses and small binoculars as desired guest gifts from Germany. In the company of the workers, my vocabulary increased from year to year. I was surprised because I was working with Kurds, Turkmen and Druze and I had a jumble of terms (including a surprising number of swear words) stuck in my brain.

The campaign in August and September led to a total of 28 locations in Djebel al-Ala and Djebel Sim'an (Pl. 2. 3), and once a week to Aleppo to buy mineral water, coffee beans for Umm Feisal, olives, cheese, etc. The campaign also in-

cluded a visit to the village of Djebel al-Ala. When working in the individual places, I was able to build on the results of the “*Églises syriennes à bêma*”. This means that in the bema churches I supplemented Tchalenko’s capital documentation and concentrated on the building decoration of the churches without bema and expanded it in my survey of individual house buildings. In many sites, two or three churches with highly contrasting capital and door forms had been preserved. The great differences between the individual church buildings raised the question early on as to whether they were due solely to contrasts within the workshops or to influences from the urban area.

Thus, in the always admired wide arcade basilica of Qalbloze – Georges Tchalenko’s favourite building – I first encountered an extremely complex overall picture of the building decoration, which with its diverse forms of capitals, doors and cornices showed the coexistence of different groups of workmen¹³. The question was: Which craftsmen came from the mountain massif and which ones might have come from elsewhere, from one of the large cities, or had taken up forms developed there?

In September, I met Georges Tchalenko and Jean-Pierre Sodini with his architect Jean-Luc Biscop in Aleppo at the Hotel Baron: the documentation of Dehes as an outstanding project of the Institut Francais was being prepared for 1975 and they were waiting for Georges Tate, i.e., to conclude his studies in France.

At the beginning of October I went to Qal’at Sim’an and stayed there, after a short stopover in Damascus, until the end of November. I lived in the small house that Tchalenko had built in front of the northwest corner of the cross-shaped compound: a small wooden door led onto a long, covered terrace that opened into two rooms with simple furnishings. In this small house with a view down to the plain of Afrin and a wide view all the way to Turkey, I experienced the most beautiful time of my years in Syria.

At the beginning of October I went to Qal’at Sim’an and stayed there, with a brief stopover in Damascus, until the end of November. I lived in the small house that Tchalenko had built in front of the northwest corner of the cruciform martyrion: a small wooden door led onto a long, covered terrace that opened into two rooms with simple furnishings¹⁴. I experienced the most beautiful time of my years in Syria in this small house with a view down to the plain of Afrin and a wide view all the way to Turkey.

After such a positive description, a comment is probably due regarding the frequently asked question: Didn't you have any problems as a European woman? In contrast to my experiences in Germany, I had no problems in Syria and it was Mustafa, the guard in Qal'at Sim'an, whose explanation I am passing on here: *"You have a car, cameras, money to pay the workers: You are rich"*. And then followed a somewhat cautious description of my appearance (1.80 m tall), which rather reminded him of female figures from old sagas. What he meant by that remained unclear despite all the queries. Since Eva Strommenger had comparable positive experiences, her statement following some negative encounters in Germany is quoted here: *"I never had to suffer such discrimination as in my home country elsewhere. Especially in the context of my work in Iraq and Syria, my engagement was always recognised..."*¹⁵.

My task in Qal'at Sim'an was the detailed documentation of the capitals in the four basilicas of the cruciform building (Pl. 6). I was hospitably received and assisted by five workers wherever necessary. The elders in Deir Sim'an could still remember the years when they had worked on the restoration in Qal'at Sim'an under Tchalenko. It was especially the family of the Kurdish mukhtar of Deir Sim'an, Beschir Abd el Kadr, in whose midst I spent many hours. They pampered me in every conceivable way: Early in the morning, a basket with olives, peppers, yoghurt, cheese, eggs, pomegranates from Dana and sometimes even honey would be placed at the entrance door to my little paradise.

At that time, only a few tourists made it to Qal'at Sim'an. The steep path up to the east entrance was not yet asphalted, the restaurant in front of the north side had not yet been built and the place was not yet part of the excursion programmes of Syrian schools. When we came without a car, we walked the old pilgrimage path on the west side, up to the Plateau (Pl. 6a. 11a). What a difference to the turbulent situation I encountered in later decades.

In November, the winter storms set in. Mustafa, the guardian of Qal'at Siman had strung a rope on the interior side of the south and west basilicas of the cruciform building, that is in front of the large openings through which the wind swept, along which I could safely reach my little house. How, for heaven's sake, had Simeon been able to hold himself high up on his column without roping himself – the interested reader should read the Syriac Vita.

The end of October was visitor time in my little palace: First Georges Tchalenko came for two days and for long talks about his work in the 1930s and 1940s in Qal'at Sim'an. His report on the restoration of the entrance complex of

the southern arm of the cruciform complex was particularly fascinating (Pl. 11b). Then the team from Eva Strommenger's excavation in Habuba Kabira came for a return visit – I had visited their excavation in September. They had bought all kinds of strange canned European dishes (wursti con krauti!) and several bottles of Liebfrauenmilch in Aleppo. Everything was lowered into the cistern at Simeon's Column for cooling (Pl. 14b) and later brought back up for a 5-star meal. Luckily everyone brought air mattresses.

During my initial documentations of the capitals in the four basilicas, I had realised that my analyses could only capture part of the multiple issues associated with the extraordinarily rich findings of the building's decoration. I had encountered some of the capital, door and cornice forms during my work in the three regions of the Limestone Massif. In some churches of the 6th century, however, the findings in individual forms led beyond Qal'at Sim'an, and in a whole number of other buildings the overall picture differed fundamentally from that of the pilgrimage centre of Qal'at Sim'an. My first impression was that in the broadly diversified findings of the sites of the Limestone Massif, I had in front of me a situation before and one after the construction of the Qal'at Sim'an complex. That is why – despite the concentration on column and pillar capitals – the minimum descriptive survey of the overall picture of the building decoration in each individual structure became fundamentally important for me.

How was this great centre (Pl. 11a. 14b) judged in previous decades? Howard Crosby Butler stated in 1929: *"If we could but recover a few fragments of the Christian architecture of Antioch, we should probably find that the church of Saint Simeon was only a reflection of the architecture of the capital city"*¹⁶. Georges Tchalenko was the first to discuss the basic features of the building's decoration and saw a wealth of imported elements *"tant syriens qu'étrangers"* alongside local ones, first mentioning the involvement of local work groups¹⁷. All authors who, like Gertrude Bell, assumed that the architecture and building decoration were closely linked to the metropolis of Antioch, could not use any of Antioch's sacred buildings for comparison, since none of the hundreds of surviving churches had been preserved within the city or had come to light during excavations due to their deep submergence.

So there I was, sitting on the pedestal of the Column of Simeon (Pl. 14b), looking for a solution to a dilemma: I had found a way to go into the massif for a new project with the concession for the documentation of the capitals. Within a

group of works or workshop, the elaboration of a capital was usually entrusted to the best-trained stonemasons. In the column capitals, therefore, rural traditions and any innovations leading beyond them are particularly tangible.

In the past months, however, I had come to understand that the capital findings should be considered as part of the overall impression of the building decoration of each individual building. Only this overall picture would make the character of individual groups of works / workshops tangible. Would I in the coming campaigns be in a position to record, at least by description, not only the capitals but also the findings of doors and cornices? And would I be able to include a selection of at least a few particularly significant pieces in my publication?

After completing the first campaign, I sent my report on all the activities of the first campaign from Qal'at Sim'ān to Afif Bachnassi, the Director General of the Syrian Antiquities Commission in Damascus, and applied for a second campaign in 1975.

On 27th November I regretfully said goodbye, drove to Beirut, took the car and myself onto the ship and drove to Venice. It didn't help that I had spent the night in Brixen on the 2. December before continuing on to Munich; after driving onto the Brenner motorway, an Italian lorry skidding on black ice wrecked my car on the 3rd December and I ended up not in Munich but in hospital in Innsbruck and in hospital in Munich another two weeks later.

1975. Start of the civil war; second campaign in the Limestone Massif

In the spring I worked on the material recordings of the first campaign in Munich, gradually recovering from the consequences of the accident. The paralysis of the left side of my face was slowly receding and so was the disorder of my balance. My broken toes were slowly healing, but a fracture of the temporal bone had severely and permanently damaged my right ear. The best news during my preparations for the summer was that the architect Alexander Wetzig, who had graduated in the meantime and who had already travelled with me in 1971, would take part in the planned campaign.

During the preparatory period, some of the events that led to the beginning of the civil war in Lebanon occurred: In retrospect, the attack on a church on 3rd April 1975 and the subsequent revenge by Christian militias who subsequently killed 27 occupants of a bus – most of them Palestinians – is seen as

one of the incidents that triggered the beginning of the civil war in Lebanon. In the months of correspondence between Ernest Will, Georges Tchalenko and Klaus Wessel, who as head of the institute in Munich was in charge of my scholarship, there is no trace of these events, which profoundly changed the situation in Beirut and subsequently led to the abandonment of the Institut Français there and the transfer of the library to the Institut Français in Damascus.

The extensive correspondence was exclusively about the demand of a group in Paris to return all the photos that Tchalenko had given me after the trip with his collaborator Claude Vernet in 1971, as well as all the copies of drawings from his archive that were in my possession. I didn't want Claude Vernet's photos, because they were almost entirely unsatisfactory. On the other hand, I had already sent my approximately 3000 photos in 13 × 18 enlargements to Tchalenko in 1972. It was therefore a question of the drawings and photos for the bema book. It was no secret that I had already read the manuscript of the bema book in 1971 and received a copy of the text and some drawings in 1975. In my letters to Ernest Will in 1975, I had thanked him for allowing me to build on the results on the "*Églises syriennes*" in my first campaign and to concentrate on the building decoration of the churches without Bema. So why this reaction from Paris after two years?

It is sad to report the chain of depressing events in the last years of Georges Tchalenko's life. Some information has already been included in my obituary (1989) and in my review of the "*Églises syriennes à bêma*" (1992)¹⁸. But it is not until this report that I can describe how much my initial project planning and my subsequent work in the Limestone Massif were intertwined with the Mission archéologique de Haute Syrie and events in Lebanon and Syria.

One positive development should be mentioned that occurred during the second campaign: in 1975 Kassem Toueir became director of the Département de Recherches archéologiques at the Directorate General in Damascus. His extensive knowledge of the early Byzantine and early Islamic periods made him my most important advisor in the following years.

The campaign in 1975 focused on the settlements of Djebel Zawiye (Pl. 3). I had not visited the southern region, the Djebel Zawiye, in 1974, but had become acquainted with some of its places in passing during the journey of 1971. That first impression already revealed clear differences in the architecture of house and church buildings of the Apamene as well as their building decoration to the

central and northern regions of the Limestone Massif, the Antiochene. At the very top of the agenda therefore, was a long stay in El Bara, the most important settlement of the region¹⁹.

In El Bara, the house of the guardian of antiquities Abu Aboud became Alexander Wetzig's and my headquarters. It was located in the modern settlement that had been built opposite the ancient site (Pl. 7a). A very specific situation connected the two places: one family owned the grounds of each of the numerous churches. Low fieldstone walls enclosed each property and made every walk through the ancient settlement a tiring scramble over little walls.

After arriving on 1st September and organising a small group of workers, we set off for Deir Sambul the very next day. Rarely have I come across such brilliantly preserved, richly decorated houses in a ruined village. The sight of the church was also an experience: the east and west sides standing tall with brilliantly preserved column capitals featuring wind-blown acanthus in position of find (Pl. 7b). Both the high quality of the building decoration in Deir Sambul and the broken steel cable next to a capital whose cover plate had been deeply notched for removal, introduced us to the situation that awaited us in Djebel Zawiye: windblown capitals in churches as well as in houses. Among them, perfectly crafted capitals from the years before Qal'at Sim'an, but endangered by antiquities theft in places accessible by pickup truck. I realised that the larger number of house capitals of this type that I had encountered in the Pharaon collection came from Djebel Zawiye (Pl. 4b).

Unfortunately, right at the beginning of our work in El Bara, I have to address the situation in the guardhouse there, which did not make the place the "magic city" that Gertrude Bell had so enthusiastically described. We were on our way to Shinsharah, which had impressed me that deeply in 1971, when Abu Aboud's uncle (Pl. 37c) warned me: "*Don't be disappointed: all the capitals of the church are gone.*" I arrived, saw the mess inside the church with the remains of what used to be nine capitals, and exploded. The workers, I was told, were impressed and very keen to work in the days that followed.

Abu Aboud had organised the removal of the capitals, and it did not take long to realise that antiquities theft was his speciality. Abu Feisal's attitude was completely different; he loved "*his sites*" in Bashmishli and suffered from the fact that he did not have a moped to make it easier for him to control the situation in his sites.

We visited all the sites of Djebel Zawiye: Only Djerade and Ruweiha had a church with bema, which had been recorded in detail by Georges Tchalenko. The starting point for our work was therefore substantially different from that in Antiochene. For weeks, the focus was on the churches of El Bara, for which Tchalenko was the first to draw up ground plans and make partial photographs.

In each of the five main churches, almost all of them gallery churches, we were faced with a very special situation:

- a) The centre of the church *extra muros* (El Hosn) had been cleared out for the installation of a field and all the preserved elements of the building made up high lateral mountains of rubble.
- b) In the main church of the 5th century with the enormous collapsed layers of its two storeys, the capitals of the uppermost found layers had been robbed, deeply buried ones, on the other hand, had survived. The main doors of the west side, famous for the drawings of Melchior de Vogüé²⁰, had collapsed.
- c) Despite the well-preserved eastern part, the features of the transept church had suffered the most: The interior had been largely emptied, fragments of doors and cornices had been blocked into the enclosing walls of the terrain, and some particularly elaborate capitals had been reused in houses in the modern settlement.
- d) In the small church of the 6th century, the uppermost capitals had also disappeared, but it was still well preserved as a building.

It quickly became apparent that I had found and recorded some capitals of El Hosn in the Pharaon collection (Pl. 4a. b). This was repeated with two capitals of the Transept Church. In addition, the capitals of which Georges Tchalenko had given me photos to check had also disappeared. This left no doubt that documentation was urgently needed in every church. We worked with a particularly strong motivation, i.e. with the knowledge that we could not be sure of encountering the recorded capitals during our next campaign. We made find plans of the large churches, recorded some capitals in detail and the main dimensions of deeply buried ones, photographed the building elements that seemed to be important for the reconstruction of the overall picture and still had the feeling that everything was too little.

Following the documentation in El Bara, we drove to Apamea, the 'capital' of Apamene (Pl. 2. 3), where we unfortunately found only a few capitals leading back to Djebel Zawiye. Decades of antiquities theft had also affected the capitals here. Again, I was able to trace some capitals from the Pharaon collection back to Apamea. After relaxing days in the house of the Belgian excavation, fruitful discussions with our friends Jean and Janine Balty, who had been in charge of the excavation since 1965 and could only too well understand our problems working in the Limestone Massif, we left for Aleppo. The continuation of the documentation of the Antiochene sites was prepared.

The weeks in Abu Feisal's house, the overall harmonious atmosphere in Bashmishli – after the time in El Bara we enjoyed everything doubly. In the first days, Alexander Wetzig and I – supported by Abu Feisal and four workers – came to Bakirha, Dar Qita, Behyo and Bettir for supplementary documentation. Afterwards, the initial recordings began in Bankusa, Deir Seta, Kaukanaya, Djuwaniye, Me'ez and Bafetin. The focus of all the documentation was the capital sculpture of the 6th century churches, which, as in 1974, was expanded by recordings in individual house buildings. In this campaign, too, it became clear that supplementary documentation would be absolutely necessary in a further campaign.

After Alexander Wetzig's return flight, I went again in October to Qal'at Sim'an and Deir Sim'an for a fortnight. During my final stay in Aleppo, I sent the report on my activities to Damascus to the Syrian Antiquities Commission, presented the results of the two campaigns at my meeting with the director of the museum in Aleppo, and informed him that I would apply to Damascus and the Institut Français for another campaign in 1977. I was grateful for the good atmosphere in the talks in Aleppo.

Journey to Izmir

The return journey by ship was planned from Beirut, but a phone call at Hotel Ramsis from the Deutsches Orientinsitut in Beirut on my last day in Aleppo changed everything: The situation in Beirut had worsened considerably – fierce fighting in the city, major problems at the port. I was advised to go back from Izmir with the Turkish Maritime Line. I immediately set off for the Syrian border and ended up at the Bab al-Hawa border station in a huge traffic jam of cars: it was census day in Turkey. I can no longer reconstruct what I said during

my dramatic descriptions at the border and my calls to the governor in Isken-derun, but the miracle happened: I received the permit to continue and drove to Izmir with a large notice on the windscreen in glorious autumn weather on empty, car-free roads.

When I got there and parked my car in Atatürk Boulevard, I saw a bookshop directly opposite my car and entered. After choosing two books, I went to the checkout, looked at the elevated cover of the FAZ *“Beirut in Flammen”* and started reading. The FAZ sank down and smiling, the lady at the checkout asked me, *“Where are you from?”* I pointed to the title. With a loud shout, Harry Blackburn was asked to join the cashier and it was Elisabeth Blackburn – as I soon learned – who stated bluntly that I was to accompany her to her nearby flat for a warm bath and a good tea. I followed, soon enjoying a warm bath, the tea trolley rolled in, and I wondered how worn out I must have looked standing at the till. In the evening, friends of Harry and Elisabeth Blackburn were invited over, I had as much to tell them about Lebanon as possible, the souvenirs from my bus were unpacked and passed around. At the highlight of the evening, the Baron von Angeli and I discovered a passion we had in common: crafting necklaces out of beads and silver balls – what a day.

On the day of departure with the Turkish Maritime Line, everyone accompanied me to the port. I was standing on the deck and was tapped from behind: *“Turn around”*. It was the Pergamon Excavation team, who had also booked the last ship. On the way back, there was a lot of talk about Elisabeth Blackburn, who was known to all the staff of the German excavations. I gratefully enjoyed the little book by Enno Littmann about the story *“Vom Morgenländischen Floh”* that she had given me. For once, the journey to Munich after arriving in Venice was without accident.

1976. Stay in Rome. Evaluation of the campaigns

At the beginning of 1976 I went to the German archaeological Institut in Rome, whose library offered the best conditions for working out the documentation in Syria. I lived in the old town and enjoyed the relaxing and lively atmosphere in Rome for a whole year after exhausting work. In December I returned to Munich with the finished text and plate volume, submitted the work for habilitation at the university and applied to the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft for continuation of the documentation in Syria. The proposal had been preceded by an exchange of letters with the Institut Français in Beirut and the Syrian An-

tiquities Commission in Damascus, who had given me the green light to continue the campaign.

1977. Third campaign in the Limestone Massif

After completing my habilitation in the summer of 1977 and receiving a material grant from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, affiliated with the Institut für Byzantinistik in Munich, I began preparations for the third campaign in Syria. Better funding made it possible to employ the architect Ulrike Hess for the whole campaign and the additional employment of the architect Thomas Rhode (Pl. 37c) for three weeks. The documentation with 6 × 6 and 35 mm cameras as well as the surveying of the capitals and the documentation of the finds were to be in my charge, as in the previous campaigns, while the drawings of selected door and cornice forms were to be in the hands of the architects.

Again, Abu Feisal's house became our headquarters for a few weeks in August and September. We began with supplementary documentation in Qalbloze, Bettir and Behyo and then went on to detailed documentation in the 6th century churches of Kefr Kila, Barisha, Bafetin, Me'ez, Kaukanaya, Djuwaniye, Deir Seta, Bankusa, Bakirha and Dar Qita (Pl. 3). We had bleak experiences with antiquities theft only in the few places that were accessible by pickup truck.

The impressive settlement of Me'ez, situated on a plain, had already been hit hard before 1971: Of the rich capitals of the 6th century church, which Georges Tchalenko had recorded in the 1950s, only isolated small fragments were left on site. The capitals that were still present around 1900 in the magnificent church in the easily accessible village of Deir Seta, had disappeared, yet the overall picture could be reconstructed with some fragments. In the more difficult to reach Bankusa, the collapse of the interior was almost undisturbed, but in the great church of Bafetin, alarm bells rang at the sight of small splinters of a capital smashed in two for removal.

During the sporadic stays in Aleppo, we had moved to the Hotel Ramsis after the change of ownership at the Hotel Baron and not only saw the excavation team from Habuba Kabira again, but also met with compatriots from the GDR. I particularly remember their reports about the chicken farms and grain silos that had just been built in Syria. The GDR government's contacts with Damascus went back to the 1960s and also shaped the situation at the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums: every now and then, a director general with a doc-

torate in Paris was followed by a director general with studies and a doctorate in West Berlin or the GDR.

In the last days of the fasting month of Ramadan, the two architects drove to Raqqa, Palmyra, Habuba Kabira and I alone by VW bus to Beirut. There were too many questions that could not be answered by mail or phone, and I urgently needed information about Georges Tchalenko's situation after his "*re-traite*". From the first day to the last, the days in Beirut were dismal and deeply stressful. After endless harassment at the Lebanese border station, I entered darkness on the Damascus-Aleppo motorway behind Homs – a situation we always avoided if possible.

After an accident, transport to Hama prison

Luckily, due to the strong gusts of wind between Homs and Hama, I was driving slowly when a tricycle without lights emerged from the ditch next to the highway and crashed into the front of my bus. The two farmers were sent flying back into the field, I extricated myself from the shards of the windscreen, tomatoes and potatoes and stood in a group of people that had appeared out of nowhere. The two drivers went to hospital and I to Hama prison. It turned out that, oh miracle, they only had minor abrasions and bruises and the young doctor at the hospital had prevented these injuries from turning into broken bones and other more serious injuries after their relatives' quick arrival.

I was delivered to the prison warden's room, who was celebrating the end of the fasting month with friends. Colonel Barakat was a French language teacher in civilian life and was happy to be able to discuss the accident with me in French. He went with me to the women's wing of the prison, where, as he had expected, I froze to a pillar of salt in the face of its dreadful conditions. Then followed the slight alteration of the duty room to accommodate the prisoner: a comfortable couch, a small tea table (a reminder of Izmir), the handing over of a very large key. It was the key of the huge gate to the Ottoman-era building, which would have opened the way under the nearby bridge over the Orontes in case I ever... since I couldn't go through the women's wing to the toilets in the men's wing... at night.

I fell asleep exhausted and with the enormous key on the little table next to me and woke up the next morning to the buzz of voices outside my door. I was visited with festive pastries: the night accident and especially the question,

“*what on earth were you doing in Beirut?*” were discussed over and over again from the beginning. Unusually quickly, the accident was heard in court, I was sentenced to pay a not overly high sum of money to the two drivers, and after my architects arrived, I was able to drive to Aleppo with a temporary wind-screen. Should the impression have now arisen that I magnetically attract accidents – the accident in Hama was not the last one I survived in Syria.

On 22nd September we went to El Bara, to Ruweiha, Mudjleya and Frikya for follow-up work and for the first time to the mosque in the neighbouring village of Kafr Ruma (Pl. 3). I will never forget the reception in the village’s mukhtar: The women – unusually tall, slim, beautiful – welcomed me so happily and light-heartedly as I had never experienced in any settlement...

In El Bara, the atmosphere was as gloomy as on our last visit: In the main church from the 5th century, the large lintel of the west side had been turned over, and the decoration of the front, where the old coloured setting was exceptionally well preserved, had been exposed to the weather for months²¹. My letter to Damascus requesting that this extraordinary lintel be transported to the museum was unsuccessful. Excavation work by the Keeper of Antiquities had begun in the transept church and was all too visible. I could only point out to Abu About that I would return next year, expecting to find all the capitals unaltered, and if not...

A great surprise were the reused capitals inside the mosque of Kafr Ruma: in it, the findings of some of the capitals of the transept church were repeated, revealing a 6th-century workshop that went decidedly beyond the capitals of Qal‘at Sim‘an²². My photographs from the 1971 trip showed that related capitals were also in the courtyard of the mosque of Ma‘arret en Noman and even led to the church in Qasr ibn Wardan, i.e. to a distant place in central Syria. The overall picture, which placed the wide arcade basilica of Ruweiha in clear contrast to the basilica of Qalbloze due to the lack of rich ornamentation in the interior, also led back once again to the journey of 1971, i.e., to the wide arcade basilica of Resafa.

It was thus clear that my next campaign would lead to sites in central Syria, to cities in the direct sphere of influence of the mountain massif – Hama, Idlib, Ma‘arret en Noman (Pl. 2) – and above all to the only at least partially preserved 6th-century church in Aleppo, ancient Beroea. In my meeting with the director of the museum in Aleppo, I raised the opportunity for possible documentation

in the Madrasa al-Hallawiya – the Madrasa connected with the former main church of Beroea –, and his response was positive. Following my work report to the Director General in Damascus, I submitted the request for capital photographs in the Madrasa al-Hallawiya.

After two weeks of work in Qal‘at Sim‘an together with Ulrike Hess, I drove back to Beirut with her to meet Georges Tchalenko once again. Upon entering Beirut’s Ashrafiye neighbourhood, I was deeply struck by the sight of the riddled and destroyed houses. I lost my bearings and, with the architect sitting next to me constantly berating me, somehow made it down to the riverside road. Indescribable was the drive through the centre to the German Oriental Institute, where we were greeted with the remark: *“It would probably have been better not to come”*. The city was divided into West and East Beirut. It was more than just reckless of me to drive the VW bus to the eastern part to pick up Georges Tchalenko, but... There we were sitting in the Orient Institute discussing the results of the campaign. Georges Tchalenko was happy to have Ulrike Hess’ so delightfully good drawings in front of him and also relieved to be able to report on his catastrophic situation as well as the miserable state of the Bema book – everything was good and deeply depressing at the same time.

1977. Return journey by ship from Beirut via Alexandria to Venice

The return journey to Europe turned out to be more difficult than expected, because the Turkish Maritime Line ship had been hijacked by Mecca pilgrims. Henri Pharaon drove with us and his agent to the port of Beirut and negotiated. In the meantime, Ulrike had got into a dangerous situation: She took photo after photo of the people sitting in front of the cellar holes of their destroyed houses and in seconds was surrounded by an angry group of people. Without the agent’s intervention, things would have ended badly. Then came the solution to our problems: Henri Pharaon had ‘leased’ a Danish ship at ample pay. We were loaded onto the VW bus and transported to Alexandria together with countless cockroaches. The return trip to Venice on an Adriatica ship was more luxurious than any trip I had experienced up to that point.

1978. End of the documentation in Qal‘at Sim‘an.

In 1977 I had sent a copy of my habilitation thesis and a recently published article on Qal‘at Sim‘an to Ernest Will, along with plans for the fourth campaign. In

1978 an exchange of letters began, which continued in 1979 and fundamentally changed my situation in the Limestone Massif. I had requested permission to make detailed documentation of some of the column capitals I had recorded in Qal'at Sim'an, asked for permission to publish the drawings of approximately 12 doors and cornices, and considered it sensible to transport the endangered and particularly important capitals from Bafetin to a museum. The publication of the capitals of Qal'at Sim'an was denied me with the reference to the imminent documentation of a French équipe: "*J. P. Sodini et moi-meme avons formé le projet d'une étude plus approfondie consacrée à Qalat Seman ... Cette étude peut commencer des cette année par des relevés consacrés au décor ornamental*" (letter from Ernest Will dated 26th February 1979). For my documentation of 12 doors, the Institut Français announced a comprehensive documentation of all (!) doors of the Limestone Massif in the near future; the transport of endangered capitals to the museum in Aleppo was not permitted.

What happened, however, was this: The 5th century capitals were included in the concession for my treatment of the 4th to 6th century capitals and were published by me in 1993 together with a small selection of doors and cornices (Pl. 16b). According to the last reports on the situation of the building complex after 2011, a large part of the column capitals had disappeared or been damaged, whereas the pillar capitals had largely been preserved. In 2016, the octagon and the entrance façade of the southern basilica of the cruciform complex were hit by air raids and shell impacts (Pl. 12b) – I will come back to this later.

The transport of endangered capitals to the museum in Aleppo many years ago by Georges Tchalenko had made a lot of sense, because it was the only way to preserve at least one capital of the church of Qasr ibn Wardan. The capitals of Bafetin, which we documented in detail in the fourth campaign, were taken away in the antiquities trade before 1990. I published them in 2002.

1979. Fourth campaign: documentation in the Madrasa al-Hallawiya and in Qasr ibn Wardan

In 1979, the first recordings took place outside the Limestone Massif, for I had obtained permission for the Madrasa al-Hallawiya and had been invited by Kamel Schehade to Qasr ibn Wardan for the documentation of the capitals.

The permission for documentation in the Madrasa al-Hallawiya was a god-send (Pl. 8. 9), since none of the churches within the walls of Antioch are preserved or could be excavated. In the church next to the madrasa, which according to tradition was the main church of ancient Beroea, today's Aleppo, capitals have been preserved, which are of great importance for understanding the building decoration of the Limestone Massif (Pl. 9a. b). Photos of the capitals in older literature did not reveal anything significant, as all elements had been whitewashed²³.

Now all the capitals of the interior were documented and, most importantly, their whitewashed individual motifs were recorded in detailed sketches²⁴. The result was fascinating, as I could trace the relationships of the capitals of a northern Syrian city to the findings in the Limestone Massif (Pl. 16b. c). When in 2014 the Hallewiyya al-Madrasa was badly damaged by shell impacts and subsequent fire during the fighting in the old city of Aleppo (Pl. 8b. 9c), the capitals of the western part, which we had recorded in detail, were hit particularly hard. Not for the first time, I was grateful that detailed documentation had taken place before the destruction or theft (Pl. 9a. b). I had brought two special ladders with me in the VW bus, which assisted Heike Fastje in the graphic documentation of some of the capitals and enabled me to make a detailed recording of each capital. The result was exciting: all the innovations going beyond Qal'at Sim'an appeared as basic forms on the capitals and led to 6th-century capital and door forms. There was some evidence that these innovations were also known in the metropolis of Antioch, but the extent to which the image of the church of Beroea was transferable to the metropolis remained open.

With this new documentation, we went to El Bara, Bakirha and Bafetin for detailed surveying, as well as to the museums of Hama, Idlib, Ma'arret en Noman and Aleppo. In Bafetin, we were surprised by the sudden inspection visit of Ernest Will and Jean-Pierre Sodini in the 6th-century church. Heike Fastje was drawing one of the capitals and I wrote in my diary: What would have happened if I had just measured one of the unauthorised doors? I got up, told Heike that I was going to the church of Mshabbak for about an hour and disappeared.

During our stay in Qasr ibn Wardan, we encountered the already advanced excavations and restorations of Kamel Schehade and brought the two special ladders as a guest gift. We were able to supplement the previously known capitals

with those that had just been unearthed²⁵. We spent the night in one of the few mud-brick houses, which at that time were not yet part of a village extended by numerous domestic buildings.

The asphalt road to Qasr ibn Wardan had not been completed in 1979, and the tracks to places further inland were only somewhat manageable in Kamel Schehade's pickup truck. This is particularly memorable to me because it was then that I first came cross-country to al-Andarin, of which Kamel Schehade had told me miraculous things. It was reported in one of the churches there, that there were other capitals of the same kind as in the church of Qasr ibn Wardan. Shortly before sunset, after a gruelling drive in the pickup truck, we arrived at the southern church and in the last twilight I recorded some of these capitals – little did I know that eighteen years later I would begin excavation work in this very place.

This year, the outward and return journey no longer took us to Lebanon, but to Turkey: Venice-Izmir-Venice: the information we received from the German Oriental Institute in Beirut and from Georges Tchalenko indicated that the situation in Lebanon had deteriorated once again since 1977.

It was particularly sad to hear that Georges Tchalenko was not allowed to supervise the publication of the drawings of the "*Églises syriennes à bêma*". They had been published in 1979 under the title "*Églises de villages*" and not with Tchalenko as author, but with the indication "*Dessins établis sous la direction de Georges Tchalenko par Edgar Baccache*". This was an extremely problematic decision for the book, Edgar Baccache had not been involved in any of the documentation in the Limestone Massif and had spent years under Tchalenko's direction transcribing his pencil drawings into ink. It was clear that a publication without the author's say had been initiated with the modification of the title, the abolition of Tchalenko's intended division of drawings for the text volume and drawings for the plate volume, as well as the decision for the large format vehemently rejected by the author. As justification, the letters from Ernest Will and Georges Tate emphasised that Tchalenko only had an author's right for the text and not for the drawings and photos.

1980. Follow-up work in the Limestone Massif; preparation of
a Syria Exhibition

When I came to Damascus in spring 1980 to prepare the Syria exhibition “*Land of Baal*”, the situation there had been altered with the founding of the branch office of the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut in Berlin. There was now a contact point for all archaeologists working in Syria. My personal situation had also changed: I had been appointed to a professorship at the University of Heidelberg and would begin teaching there in the summer semester of 1980.

Together with Eva Strommenger’s team²⁶, I prepared the selection of objects in the museum in Damascus and travelled to Mar Jakob Monastery near Qara, to Mar Aelian Monastery 10 km from Qaryatain and to Halawe on the Euphrates for the first time. The subsequent follow-up work in the Limestone massif concentrated on Qirqbize, Banakfur and Me‘ez. This was the last time I was able to enjoy the hospitality of the house of the guardian of antiquities, Abu Feisal, because the French team had rented the Sermada school for the work in Deḥes.

I had hoped to meet Georges Tchalenko in Damascus, but only telephone contact was feasible. The events connected with the printing of the Bema book had intensified: after the publication of the first volume, the volume with Georges Tchalenko’s photos appeared in 1980 under the name of Edgar Baccache, who had not taken any of the photos, in the large format that Tchalenko had always rejected. All queries were answered by pointing out that all the documentation Georges Tchalenko had produced, financed by the Institut Français, was the property of the Institute and that the author alone had the right to the text. Georges Tchalenko hoped to clarify the overall situation of the book in his Foreword to the text volume.

I had known the text volume since 1971 and – despite all Tchalenko’s cautions not to tie the publication of my book to his book – I wanted to wait for the publication of his text volume. It appeared in 1990, only three years after his death and without the Foreword for which he had fought with the support of a lawyer.

The first volume of my works in the 1970s was published in 1993, after Alice Naccache’s publication of “*all the doors*”, the second volume in 2002, i.e. after the start of excavation work in al-Andarin. The work by Jean Pierre Sodini on the building decoration of Qal‘at Sim‘an, announced in 1979, is still awaited, but

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a few reports on their work have been published: The French Institute's work on the large centre had begun.

1989–1990. Journey to the ruined sites of the massif, which now belong to Turkey

During my campaigns in the Limestone Massif, I had often passed the Qasr el Banat monastery on the road to the Bab al-Hawa border station. Only once had I gone up to it for a few minutes, because it lies in the borderland between Turkey and Syria. In early 1989, I received a letter from the Syrian archaeologist Widad Khoury, who in the 1980s had begun work in the ancient settlements of Djebel Wastani, a region of the Limestone Massif that Georges Tchalenko had not included in his book on the "*Villages antiques*".

Widad Khoury informed me that through her contacts in Antioch, now Antakya, she could get permission to visit the sites in the restricted military area. I was in the middle of preparing the printing of Volume I on building decoration and immediately decided to fly to Syria once again. We met in Idlib at the home of Souad, the headmistress of the primary school, and prepared the visit to El Bara as well as the trip to No Man's Land.

I first went to Bashmishli to see Abu Feisal's family again for the first time in ten years. Now the village had a water tower and there was even a television in Abu Feisal's house. A tourist now stayed in the small Tchalenko house from time to time, because tourists, I learned, came much more often now than before. Abu Feisal introduced me to his successor and asked me to drive him to Bshendlaya, where they had the best tobacco (Pl. 3). I went, i.e., first drove along the new asphalt road to Bakirha and Dar Qita. A minibus with tourists was parked in front of the Sergius Church. I parked my rented car and went inside the church. In each church, I encountered disturbed finds; the capitals I had recorded were either damaged or could no longer be found. I could readily imagine how easy it had become to park pickup trucks in front of the structures and load objects... I did not get out of the car on the way to Bshendlaya, did not visit any of the ancient sites accessible from Bashmishli. False sentimentality? No, this was a change I did not want to be visiting.

Even before our arrival in El Bara, we had learned at the museum in Idlib that Abu Aboud's son had wanted to sell a capital in Lattakia, was arrested there by the police and had to bring the capital back to El Bara. So after arriv-

ing, we asked directly for this capital. I stood in front of the capital with circulating arcades from the Transept Church, which I had assumed was ‘secured’ in its deep hole, covered by a pile of ashlars, after my documentation²⁷. Abu Ahmed’s son succeeded his father as guardian of antiquities a few years later.

A final shock in El Bara was the reconstruction of the small church documented by Jean-Pascal Fourdrin²⁸, by a Syrian architect. He had managed to place everything incorrectly, not only inside, but also on the north façade. Had no one thought of copying him one of the old pictures of the façade? With Widad Khoury, I went once again to the places of Djebel Zawiye where I had worked. Our report on elements of building decoration – set up by the roadside, ready for removal – was received at the General Directorate in Damascus with some comments about the two ladies’ trip.

I am still thoroughly grateful for such a different day in Qasr el Banat, Herbet Tezin and Qasr Iblisu, the places in the borderlands. Widad Khoury had received permission and, accompanied by Turkish military, we went up into the hard-to-reach places of Djebel Barisha. The magic of these deserted and unsettled places resonated with each of us. In high spirits, we returned to the Turkish military station and celebrated our farewell to the borderlands.

2016–2019. On the situation in Qal‘at Sim‘an after 2011

When I received the first report on vandalism in the cross-shaped complex built around the Pillar of Simeon in 2014, I had no idea of the extent of the destruction to all the structures on the plateau between 2016 and 2019. The detailed reports by the team of the SIMAT – ‘Syrians for Heritage Association’ – not only about Qal‘at Sim‘ān, but also about numerous locations in the Limestone Massif – were more than merely shocking to me²⁹.

It is reported that as early as 2012 Qal‘at Sim‘an was no longer controlled by the “*General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums (DGMA) or any other specialised authority that may be able to maintain the site and enforce its protection*”. In 2016, multiple bombardments, shells and rockets hit the entrance façade of the Southern Cross arm and the octagon of the building complex. An exploding missile not only hit the column and its pedestal, it also damaged the surrounding pillar positions with their archivolts. In addition, the mosaic floor of the 10th century in the Eastern Church was also looted.

The report's commentary on the completely empty interiors of the Arms of the Cross reads: "*The most alarming activity, however, was inside the church where the eastern and northern basilica floors are completely washed away, including the columns bases*"³⁰ – what a grotesque situation: after the collapse of the columns and after the restorations of Georges Tchalenko the capitals of the basilicas were placed in front of the interior walls or in the western part of the cruciform building. There I recorded them in the 1970s and published them – against all resistance – in 1993. Columns and capitals were no longer present in 2016 and, in a completely senseless action, the column bases had also been removed³¹.

In the eastern basilica the decoration of the apse is not destroyed (Pl. 16a) and the capitals of the columns were published in 1993. With a capital of the eastern basilica (Pl. 16b), I look back to the capitals of the Madrasa al-Hallawiyia (Pl. 9a. b) and to the capitals in the church of Deir Sambul (Pl. 9c): The void of the interior could be filled with a documentation of the old photos and drawings. The look towards Aleppo and to the south of the mountain massif illustrates the contact between the local workshops working at a high level and the workshops operating in the large cities³².

In 2006, I had witnessed the excavation and removal of the column bases of the church in the courtyard of the kastron of Androna. I was told at the time that column bases were easy to sell because they could be reused in new buildings. I would never have believed it possible that something comparable would happen in Qal'at Sim'an. Perhaps one day I will find out why the basilicas were completely cleared out...

It was only after reading the SIMAT reports that I was able to somewhat imagine how it had been possible to carry out looted excavations during the military conflicts in Qal'at Sim'an: The reports on the situation in the ruined sites of the Limestone Massif demonstrate that all control over stone theft, antiquities theft, looted excavation was lost during the war years.

2019. Publication of G. Tchalenko's restoration work at Qal'at Sim'an
by J. Tchalenko

After I had received the text volume on the "*Églises Syriennes*" published in 1990, I remained in contact for over 30 years with John Tchalenko, who was administering his father's estate, and discussed with him the publication of the re-

port on his father's restoration work in Qal'at Sim'an. As early as 1993, I had pointed out the important publication of the restorations³³, but John Tchalenko expected the French to prevent the publication and kept postponing it. It now appeared some 32 years after his father's death, with a superb biography and an overview of his most important publications.

The publication came at a time when it is doubtful that the restoration of the world heritage site can be carried out with just as well trained workers and with a comparably high standard of the architects.

Despite the long delay, the publication came at the right time: it will support the restoration of the Qal'at Sim'an World Heritage Site. I am not adapting my report to correct or expand on the current publication because it addresses events that were not dealt with in the publication. I am grateful to John Tchalenko to discover Tchalenko's preface to the text volume of the "*Églises Syriennes à bêma*" in the book, for which he had fought in vain for years with his lawyer³⁴. I am no longer the only person for whom Georges Tchalenko's last major publication is inextricably linked to the events of 1972–1987.

In my work in the Limestone Massif I had followed the example of Howard Crosby Butler and his colleagues, albeit on a much smaller scale: As far as my strength and equipment allowed, I recorded a certain group of objects in about 60 ruin sites that could be accessed in the surface findings. There was, however, one major difference: The Limestone Massif had become French concession territory. The granting of concessions will probably be different in the future, because the ruin sites of the North Syrian Limestone Massif have become Unesco World Heritage Sites. Despite all the difficulties described above, the enormous problems of restoration will be in the focus of attention in the years to come. I will present some thoughts on how to deal with the documentation of Syrian cultural property made before 2011 after the description of my second project.