SYRIA, the name given generally to the land lying between the easternmost shore of the Levantine GulE and a natural inland boundary formed in part by the Middle Euphrates and in part by the western edge of the *Hamãd* or desert steppe. The northern limit is the Tauric system of mountains, and the southern limit the edge of the Sinaitic desert. This long strip extends, therefore, for about 400 m. between 3S0 and 310 N. lat. with a mean breadth of about 150 m. Since, however, the steppe edge on the east is somewhat indefinite, some early Moslem and other geographers have included all the Hamãd in Syria, making of the latter a blunt-headed triangle with a base some 7∞ m. long resting on. the north Arabian Nefud. But Strabo, Pliny and Ptolemy, as well as the better Moslem geographers, drew the eastern frontier obliquely from the Gulf of Akeba to Rakka (Raqqa) on Euphrates, and thus placed the Hamãd in Arabia.

The name *Syria* is not found in the Hebrew original of the Scriptures; but it was used by the Septuagint to translate Aram. Homer knows only 'Apι∕xoι, but Herodotus speaks of “ Syrians ” as identical with Assyrians, the latter being, he thinks, a “ bar­barian ” form, and he applies the name very widely to include, *e.g.* north Cappadocians (“ White Syrians ” of Pteria). Syria, however, is probably the Babylonian *Suri,* used of a north Euphratean district, and a word distinct from Assyria. Generally the ethnic term, Syrians, came to mean in antiquity the Semiti peoples domiciled outside the Meso­potamian and Arabian areas: but neither in pre-Greek nor in Greek times had the word Syria any very precise geographical significance, various lands, which we include under it, retaining their distinctive status, *e.g.* Comrπagene (Kummukh), Cyrrhestica, Phoenicia, Palestine, &c. It is

only under the Graeco-Roman administration that we find a definite district known as Syria, and that was at first restricted to the Orontes basin. Later, all that we understand by Syria came to be so known officially to the Romans and Byzantines; but the only province called simply Syria, without qualification, remained in the Orontes valley. Under the present Ottoman distribution “ Syria ” is the province of Sham or Damascus, exclusive of the vilayets of Aleppo and Beirut and the sanjaks of Lebanon and Jerusalem, which all fall in what is called Syria is the wider geographical sense.

Taking Syria as the strip limited by the sea, the edge of the Hamãd, the Taurus and the Sinaitic desert, we have a remark­ably homogeneous geographical area with very obvious natural boundaries; but these, for various reasons, have proved very

ineffective in history, especially on the south and east. Syria happens to lie on the line of least resistance for communication between the early subtropic seats of civilization in the Nile and Euphrates valleys and the civilizations of Europe. Its eastern boundary is in great part a steppe, which breeds popula­tion, but, unable to nourish increase, sends it over its boundaries in a constant stream of migration. Consequently south Palestine has been continuously “Arabized”; and indeed the whole of Syria has been characterized by racial and religious fusions, and by civilization of a singularly syncretic and derived kind, of which the ancient Phoenician is a sufficient example.

The surface configuration of almost all the strip is remarkably uniform. With the exception of the extreme north (Commagene), which is shut off by a barrier of hills and belongs to foreign hydro­graphic systems, the ' whole country is roughly a gable-shaped plateau, falling north and south from a medial ridge, which crosses Syria at about its central point. This gable is tilted eastwards, and its two long slopes are defined by bordering mountain chains