

= Palmyra =

Palmyra (/ ˈpælˈmaːrə / ; Aramaic : ܩܕܡܪܬܐ Tedmurt? ; Arabic : ܬܕܡܪ Tadmor) is an ancient Semitic city in present @-@ day Homs Governorate , Syria . Archaeological finds date back to the Neolithic period , and the city was first documented in the early second millennium BC . Palmyra changed hands on a number of occasions between different empires before becoming a subject of the Roman Empire in the first century AD .

The city grew wealthy from trade caravans ; the Palmyrenes were renowned merchants who established colonies along the Silk Road and operated throughout the Roman Empire . Palmyra 's wealth enabled the construction of monumental projects , such as the Great Colonnade , the Temple of Bel , and the distinctive tower tombs . The Palmyrenes were a mix of Amorites , Arameans , and Arabs . The city 's social structure was tribal , and its inhabitants spoke Palmyrene (a dialect of Aramaic) ; Greek was used for commercial and diplomatic purposes . The culture of Palmyra was influenced by Greco @-@ Roman culture and produced distinctive art and architecture that combined eastern and western traditions . The city 's inhabitants worshiped local deities and Mesopotamian and Arab gods .

By the third century AD , Palmyra was a prosperous regional center reaching the apex of its power in the 260s , when Palmyrene King Odaenathus defeated Persian Emperor Shapur I. The king was succeeded by regent Queen Zenobia , who rebelled against Rome and established the Palmyrene Empire . In 273 , Roman emperor Aurelian destroyed the city , which was later restored by Diocletian at a reduced size . The Palmyrenes converted to Christianity during the fourth century and to Islam in the second half of the first millennium , after which the Palmyrene and Greek languages were replaced by Arabic .

Before 273 AD , Palmyra enjoyed autonomy and was attached to the Roman province of Syria , having its political organization influenced by the Greek city @-@ state model during the first two centuries AD . The city became a Roman colonia during the third century , leading to the incorporation of Roman governing institutions , before becoming a monarchy in 260 . Following its destruction in 273 , Palmyra became a minor center under the Byzantines and later empires . Its destruction by the Timurids in 1400 reduced it to a small village . Under French Mandatory rule in 1932 , the inhabitants were moved into the new village of Tadmur , and the ancient site became available for excavations . In 2015 , Palmyra came under the control of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) , which later destroyed a number of the site 's buildings . The city was retaken by the Syrian Army on 27 March 2016 .

= = Etymology = =

The earliest @-@ attested native name of the city was the Semitic language term " Tadmor " , which first appeared in the early second millennium BC . The word 's etymology is vague ; the philologist Albert Schultens argued that it derived from the Semitic word for " dates " (tamar) , thus referring to the palm trees that surrounded the city .

The name " Palmyra " appeared during the early first century AD in the works of Pliny the Elder , and was used throughout the Greco @-@ Roman world . It is generally believed that " Palmyra " derives from " Tadmor " and two possibilities have been presented by linguists ; one view holds that Palmyra was an alteration of Tadmor . According to Schultens , the Romans altered the name from " Tadmor " to " Talmura " , and afterward to " Palmura " (from the Latin word " palma " , meaning palm) , in reference to the city 's palm trees . Then the name reached its final form " Palmyra " . Other philologists , such as Jean Starcky , consider Palmyra to be a translation of " Tadmor " (assuming that it meant palm) , which had derived from the Greek word for palm , " Palame " .

The linguist Michael Patrick O 'Connor suggested that the names " Palmyra " and " Tadmor " originated in the Hurrian language . As evidence , he cited the inexplicability of alterations to the theorized roots of both names (represented in the addition of -d- to tamar and -ra- to palame) . According to this theory , " Tadmor " derives from the Hurrian word tad (" to love ") with the addition of the typical Hurrian mid vowel rising (mVr) formant mar . Similarly , according to this theory , "

Palmyra " derives from the Hurrian word pal (" to know ") using the same mVr formant (mar) .

= = Location and city layout = =

Palmyra is 215 km (134 mi) northeast of the Syrian capital , Damascus , in an oasis surrounded by palms (of which twenty varieties have been reported) . Two mountain ranges overlook the city ; the northern Palmyrene mountain belt from the north and the southern Palmyrene mountains from the southwest . In the south and the east Palmyra is exposed to the Syrian Desert . A small wadi (al @-@ Qubur) crosses the area , flowing from the western hills past the city before disappearing in the eastern gardens of the oasis . South of the wadi is a spring , Efqa . Pliny the Elder described the town in the 70s AD as famous for its desert location , the richness of its soil , and the springs surrounding it , which made agriculture and herding possible .

= = = Layout = = =

Palmyra began as a small settlement near the Efqa spring on the southern bank of Wadi al @-@ Qubur . The settlement , known as the Hellenistic settlement , had residences expanding to the wadi 's northern bank during the first century . Although the city 's walls originally enclosed an extensive area on both banks of the wadi , the walls rebuilt during Diocletian 's reign surrounded only the northern @-@ bank section .

Most of the city 's monumental projects were built on the wadi 's northern bank . Among them is the Temple of Bel , on a tell which was the site of an earlier temple (known as the Hellenistic temple) . However , excavation supports the theory that the tell was originally located on the southern bank , and the wadi was diverted south of the tell to incorporate the temple into Palmyra 's late first and early second century urban organization on the north bank .

Also north of the wadi was the Great Colonnade , Palmyra 's 1 @.@ 1 @-@ kilometre @-@ long (0 @.@ 68 mi) main street , which extended from the Temple of Bel in the east , to the Funerary Temple no.86 in the city 's western part . It had a monumental arch in its eastern section , and a tetrapylon stands in the center .

The Baths of Diocletian , built on the ruins of an earlier building which might have been the royal palace , were on the left side of the colonnade . Nearby were the Temple of Baalshamin , residences , and the Byzantine churches , which include a 1 @,@ 500 @-@ year @-@ old church (Palmyra 's fourth , and believed to be the largest ever discovered in Syria) . The church columns were estimated to be 6 metres (20 ft) tall , and its base measured 12 by 24 metres (39 by 79 ft) . A small amphitheatre was found in the church 's courtyard .

The Temple of Nabu and the Roman theater were built on the colonnade 's southern side . Behind the theater were a small senate building and the large Agora , with the remains of a triclinium (banquet room) and the Tariff Court . A cross street at the western end of the colonnade leads to the Camp of Diocletian , built by Sossianus Hierocles (the Roman governor of Syria) . Nearby are the Temple of Al @-@ l?t and the Damascus Gate .

= = People , language and society = =

At its height during the reign of Zenobia , Palmyra had more than 200 @,@ 000 residents . Its earliest known inhabitants were the Amorites in the early second millennium BC , and by the end of the millennium Arameans were mentioned as inhabiting the area . Arabs arrived in the city in the late first millennium BC ; the soldiers of the Palmyrene sheikh Zabdibel , who aided the Seleucids in the battle of Raphia (217 BC) , were described as Arabs . The Arab newcomers were assimilated by the earlier inhabitants , used Palmyrene as a mother tongue , and formed a significant segment of the aristocracy . The city also had a Jewish community ; inscriptions in Palmyrene from the necropolis of Beit She 'arim in Lower Galilee confirm the burial of Palmyrene Jews .

Until the late third century AD , Palmyrenes spoke a dialect of Aramaic and used the Palmyrene alphabet . The use of Latin was minimal , but Greek was used by wealthier members of society for

commercial and diplomatic purposes , and it became the dominant language during the Byzantine era . After the Arab conquest , Greek was replaced by Arabic , from which a Palmyrene dialect evolved .

Palmyra 's society was a mixture of the different peoples inhabiting the city , which is seen in Aramaic , Arabic and Amorite clan names . Palmyra was a tribal community but due to the lack of sources , an understanding of the nature of Palmyrene tribal structure is not possible . Thirty clans have been documented ; five of which were identified as tribes (Phyle (????)) comprising several sub @-@ clans . By the time of Nero Palmyra had four tribes , each residing in an area of the city bearing its name . Three of the tribes were the Komare , Mattabol and Ma 'zin ; the fourth tribe is uncertain , but was probably the Mita . In time , the four tribes became highly civic and tribal lines blurred ; by the second century clan identity lost its importance , and it disappeared during the third century . During the Umayyad period Palmyra was mainly inhabited by the Kalb tribe . Benjamin of Tudela recorded the existence of 2 @,@ 000 Jews in the city during the twelfth century , Palmyra declined after its destruction by Timur in 1400 , and was a village of 6 @,@ 000 inhabitants at the beginning of the 20th century ; although surrounded by Bedouin , the villagers preserved their dialect . Palmyra maintained the life of a small settlement until its relocation in 1932 .

= = Culture = =

Palmyra had a distinctive culture , based on a local Semitic tradition , and influenced by Greece and Rome . To appear better integrated into the Roman Empire , some Palmyrenes adopted Greco @-@ Roman names , either alone or in addition to a second native name . The extent of Greek influence on Palmyra 's culture is debated . Scholars interpreted the Palmyrenes ' Greek practices differently ; many see those characters as a superficial layer over a local essence . Palmyra 's senate was an example ; although Palmyrene texts written in Greek described it as a " boule " (a Greek institution) , the senate was a gathering of non @-@ elected tribal elders (a Near @-@ Eastern assembly tradition) . Others view Palmyra 's culture as a fusion of local and Greco @-@ Roman traditions .

The culture of Persia influenced Palmyrene military tactics , dress and court ceremonies . Palmyra had no large libraries or publishing facilities , and it lacked an intellectual movement characteristic of other Eastern cities such as Edessa or Antioch . Although Zenobia opened her court to academics , the only notable scholar documented was Cassius Longinus .

Palmyra had a large agora . However , unlike the Greek Agoras (public gathering places shared with public buildings) , Palmyra 's agora resembled an Eastern caravanserai more than a hub of public life . The Palmyrenes buried their dead in elaborate family mausoleums , most with interior walls forming rows of burial chambers (loculi) in which the dead , laying at full length , were placed . A relief of the person interred formed part of the wall 's decoration , acting as a headstone . Sarcophagi appeared in the late second century and were used in some of the tombs . Many burial monuments contained fully dressed , bejeweled mummies , embalmed in a method similar to that used in Ancient Egypt .

= = = Art and architecture = = =

Although Palmyrene art was related to that of Greece , it had a distinctive style unique to the middle @-@ Euphrates region . Palmyrene art is well represented by the bust reliefs which seal the openings of its burial chambers . The reliefs emphasized clothing , jewelry and a frontal representation of the person depicted , characteristics which can be seen as a forerunner of Byzantine art . According to Michael Rostovtzeff , Palmyra 's art was influenced by Parthian art . However , the origin of frontality that characterized Palmyrene and Parthian arts is a controversial issue ; while Parthian origin has been suggested (by Daniel Schlumberger) , Michael Avi @-@ Yonah contends that it was a local Syrian tradition that influenced Parthian art . Little painting , and none of the bronze statues of prominent citizens (which stood on brackets on the main columns of the Great Colonnade) , have survived . A damaged frieze and other sculptures from the Temple of

Bel , many removed to museums in Syria and abroad , suggest the city 's public monumental sculpture .

Many surviving funerary busts reached Western museums during the 19th century . Palmyra provided the most convenient Eastern examples bolstering an art @-@ history controversy at the turn of the 20th century : to what extent Eastern influence on Roman art replaced idealized classicism with frontal , hieratic and simplified figures (as believed by Josef Strzygowski and others) . This transition is seen as a response to cultural changes in the Western Roman Empire , rather than artistic influence from the East . Palmyrene bust reliefs , unlike Roman sculptures , are rudimentary portraits ; although many reflect high quality individuality , the majority vary little across figures of similar age and gender .

Like its art , Palmyra 's architecture was influenced by the Greco @-@ Roman style , while preserving local elements (best seen in the Temple of Bel) . Enclosed by a massive wall flanked with traditional Roman columns , Bel 's sanctuary plan was primarily Semitic . Similar to the Second Temple , the sanctuary consisted of a large courtyard with the deity 's main shrine off @-@ center against its entrance (a plan preserving elements of the temples of Ebla and Ugarit) .

= = Site = =

= = = Cemeteries = = =

West of the ancient walls , the Palmyrenes built a number of large @-@ scale funerary monuments which now form the Valley of Tombs , a 1 @-@ kilometre @-@ long (0 @.@ 62 mi) necropolis . The more than 50 monuments were primarily tower @-@ shaped and up to four stories high . Towers were replaced by funerary temples in the first half of the second century AD , as the most recent tower is dated to 128 AD . The city had other cemeteries in the north , southwest and southeast , where the tombs are primarily hypogea (underground) .

= = = Notable structures = = =

= = = = Public buildings = = = =

The senate building is largely ruined . It is a small building that consists of a peristyle courtyard and a chamber that has an apse at one end and rows of seats around it .

Much of the Baths of Diocletian are ruined and do not survive above the level of the foundations . The complex 's entrance is marked by four massive Egyptian granite columns each 1 @.@ 3 metres (4 ft 3 in) in diameter , 12 @.@ 5 metres (41 ft) high and weigh 20 tonnes . Inside , the outline of a bathing pool surrounded by a colonnade of Corinthian columns is still visible in addition to an octagonal room that served as a dressing room containing a drain in its center .

The Agora of Palmyra is part of a complex that also includes the tariff court and the triclinium , built in the second half of the first century AD . The agora is a massive 71 by 84 metres (233 by 276 ft) structure with 11 entrances . Inside the agora , 200 columnar bases that used to hold statues of prominent citizens were found . The inscriptions on the bases allowed an understanding of the order by which the statues were grouped ; the eastern side was reserved for senators , the northern side for Palmyrene officials , the western side for soldiers and the southern side for caravan chiefs .

The Tariff Court is a large rectangular enclosure south of the agora and sharing its northern wall with it . Originally , the entrance of the court was a massive vestibule in its southwestern wall . However , the entrance was blocked by the construction of a defensive wall and the court was entered through three doors from the Agora . The court gained its name by containing a 5 meters long stone slab that had the Palmyrene tax law inscribed on it .

The Triclinium of the Agora is located to the northwestern corner of the Agora and can host up to 40 person . It is a small 12 by 15 metres (39 by 49 ft) hall decorated with Greek key motifs that run in

a continuous line halfway up the wall . The building was probably used by the rulers of the city ; Henri Arnold Seyrig proposed that it was a small temple before being turned into a triclinium or banqueting hall .

===== Temples =====

The Temple of Bel was dedicated in 32 AD ; it consist of a large precinct lined by porticos ; it had a rectangular shape and was oriented north @-@ south . The exterior wall was 205 @-@ metre (673 ft) long with a propylaea , and the cella stood on a podium in the middle of the enclosure .

The Temple of Baalshamin dates to the late 2nd century BC in its earliest phases ; its altar was built in 115 AD , and it was substantially rebuilt in 131 AD . It consisted of a central cella and two colonnaded courtyards north and south of the central structure . A vestibule consisting of six columns preceded the cella which had its side walls decorated with pilasters in Corinthian order .

The Temple of Nabu is largely ruined . The temple was Eastern in its plan ; the outer enclosure 's propylaea led to a 20 by 9 metres (66 by 30 ft) podium through a portico of which the bases of the columns survives . The peristyle cella opened onto an outdoor altar .

The Temple of Al @-@ l?t is largely ruined with only a podium , a few columns and the door frame remaining . Inside the compound , a giant lion relief (Lion of Al @-@ l?t) was excavated and in its original form , was a relief protruding from the temple compound 's wall .

The ruined Temple of Baal @-@ hamon was located on the top of Jabal al @-@ Muntar hill which oversees the spring of Efqa . Constructed in 89 AD , it consisted of a cella and a vestibule with two columns . The temple had a defensive tower attached to it ; a mosaic depicting the sanctuary was excavated and it revealed that both the cella and the vestibule were decorated with merlons .

===== Other buildings =====

The Great Colonnade was Palmyra 's 1 @-@ 1 @-@ kilometre @-@ long (0 @-@ 68 mi) main street ; most of the columns date to the second century AD and each is 9 @-@ 50 metres (31 @-@ 2 ft) high .

The Funerary Temple no.86 (also known as the House Tomb) is located at the western end of the Great Colonnade . It was built in the third century AD and has a portico of six columns and vine patterns carvings . Inside the chamber , steps leads down to a vault crypt . The shrine might have been connected to the royal family as it is the only tomb inside the city 's walls .

The Tetracylon was erected during the renovations of Diocletian at the end of the third century . It is a square platform and each corner contains a grouping of four columns . Each column group supports a 150 tons cornice and contains a pedestal in its center that originally carried a statue . Out of sixteen columns , only one is original while the rest are from reconstruction work by the Syrian Directorate @-@ General of Antiquities in 1963 , using concrete . The original columns were brought from Egypt and carved out of pink granite .

The city 's current walls were erected during the reign of Diocletian whose fortification of the city enclosed a much smaller area than the original pre @-@ 273 city . The Diocletianic walls had protective towers and fortified gateways .

The pre @-@ 273 walls were narrow and while encircling the whole city , they do not seem to have provided real protection against an invasion . No signs of towers or fortified gates exist and it cannot be proven that the walls enclosed the city as many gaps appears to have never been defended . The earlier walls seem to have been designed to protect the city against Bedouins and to provide a costume barrier .

===== History =====

The site at Palmyra provided evidence for a Neolithic settlement near Efqa , with stone tools dated to 7500 BC . Archaeoacoustics in the tell beneath the Temple of Bel indicated traces of cultic activity dated to 2300 BC .

= = = Early period = = =

Palmyra entered the historical record during the Bronze Age around 2000 BC , when Puzur @-@ Ishtar the Tadmorean (Palmyrene) agreed to a contract at an Assyrian trading colony in Kultepe . It was mentioned next in the Mari tablets as a stop for trade caravans and nomadic tribes , such as the Suteans . King Shamshi @-@ Adad I of Assyria passed through the area on his way to the Mediterranean at the beginning of the 18th century BC ; by then , Palmyra was the easternmost point of the kingdom of Qatna . Palmyra was part of the kingdom of Amurru in the 14th century BC , and was mentioned in a 13th @-@ century BC tablet discovered at Emar , which recorded the names of two " Tadmorean " witnesses . At the beginning of the 11th century BC , King Tiglath @-@ Pileser I of Assyria recorded his defeat of the " Arameans " of " Tadmor " .

The Hebrew Bible (Second Book of Chronicles 8 : 4) records a city by the name " Tadmor " as a desert city built (or fortified) by King Solomon of Israel ; Flavius Josephus mentions the Greek name " Palmyra " , attributing its founding to Solomon in Book VIII of his Antiquities of the Jews . Later Islamic traditions attribute the city 's founding to Solomon 's Jinn . The association of Palmyra with Solomon is a conflation of " Tadmor " and a city built by Solomon in Judea and known as " Tamar " in the Books of Kings (1 Kings 9 : 18) . The biblical description of " Tadmor " and its buildings does not fit archaeological findings in Palmyra , which was a small settlement during Solomon 's reign in the 10th century BC .

= = = Hellenistic and Roman periods = = =

During the Hellenistic period under the Seleucids (between 312 and 64 BC) , Palmyra became a prosperous settlement owing allegiance to the Seleucid king . In 217 BC , a Palmyrene force led by Zabdibel joined the army of King Antiochus III in the Battle of Raphia which ended in a Seleucid defeat by Ptolemaic Egypt . In the middle of the Hellenistic era , Palmyra , formerly south of the al @-@ Qubur wadi , began to expand beyond its northern bank . By the late second century BC , the tower tombs in the Palmyrene Valley of Tombs and the city temples (most notably , the temples of Baalshamin , Al @-@ I?t and the Hellenistic temple) began to be built .

In 64 BC the Roman Republic annexed the Seleucid kingdom , and the Roman general Pompey established the province of Syria . Palmyra was left independent , trading with Rome and Parthia but belonging to neither . The earliest known Palmyrene inscription is dated to around 44 BC ; Palmyra was still a minor sheikhdum , offering water to caravans which occasionally took the desert route on which it was located . However , according to Appian Palmyra was wealthy enough for Mark Antony to send a force to conquer it in 41 BC . The Palmyrenes evacuated to Parthian lands beyond the eastern bank of the Euphrates , which they prepared to defend .

= = = = Autonomous Palmyrene region = = = =

Palmyra became part of the Roman Empire when it was annexed and paid tribute early in the reign of Tiberius , around 14 AD . The Romans included Palmyra in the province of Syria , and defined the region 's boundaries ; a boundary marker laid by Roman governor Silanus was found 75 kilometres (47 mi) northwest of the city at Khirbet el @-@ Bilaas . A marker at the city 's southwestern border was found at Qasr al @-@ Hayr al @-@ Gharbi , and its eastern border extended to the Euphrates valley . This region included numerous villages subordinate to the center such as al @-@ Qaryatayn (35 other settlements have been identified by 2012) . The Roman imperial period brought great prosperity to the city , which enjoyed a privileged status under the empire ? retaining much of its internal autonomy , being ruled by a council , and incorporating many Greek city @-@ state (polis) institutions into its government .

The earliest Palmyrene text attesting a Roman presence in the city dates to 18 AD , when the Roman general Germanicus tried to develop a friendly relationship with Parthia ; he sent the Palmyrene Alexandros to Mesene , a Parthian vassal kingdom . This was followed by the arrival of

the Roman legion Legio X Fretensis the following year . Roman authority was minimal during the first century AD , although tax collectors were resident , and a road connecting Palmyra and Sura was built in 75 AD . The Romans used Palmyrene soldiers , but (unlike typical Roman cities) no local magistrates or prefects are recorded in the city . Palmyra saw intensive construction during the first century , including the city 's first walled fortifications and the Temple of Bel (completed and dedicated in 32 AD) . During the first century Palmyra developed from a minor desert caravan station into a leading trading center , with Palmyrene merchants establishing colonies in surrounding trade centers .

Palmyrene trade reached its apex during the second century , aided by two factors ; the first was a trade route built by Palmyrenes , and protected by garrisons at major locations , including a garrison in Dura @-@ Europos manned in 117 AD . The second was the Roman annexation of the Nabataean capital Petra in 106 , shifting control over southern trade routes of the Arabian Peninsula from the Nabataeans to Palmyra .

In 129 Palmyra was visited by Hadrian , who named it " Hadriane Palmyra " and made it a free city . Hadrian promoted Hellenism throughout the empire , and Palmyra 's urban expansion was modeled on that of Greece . This led to new projects , including the theatre , the colonnade and the Temple of Nabu . Roman authority in Palmyra was reinforced in 167 , when the cavalry Ala I Thracum Herculiana garrison was moved to the city . By the end of the second century , urban development diminished after the city 's building projects peaked .

In the 190s , Palmyra was assigned to the province of Phoenice , newly created by the Severan dynasty . Toward the end of the second century , Palmyra began a steady transition from a traditional Greek city @-@ state to a monarchy due to the increasing militarization of the city and the deteriorating economic situation ; the Severan ascension to the imperial throne in Rome played a major role in Palmyra 's transition :

The Severan @-@ led Roman ? Parthian War , from 194 to 217 , influenced regional security and affected the city 's trade . Bandits began attacking caravans by 199 , leading Palmyra to strengthen its military presence . The city devoted more energy to protecting the Roman east than to commerce , and its importance increased .

The new dynasty favored the city , stationing the Cohors I Flavia Chalcidenorum garrison there by 206 . Caracalla made Palmyra a colonia between 213 and 216 , replacing many Greek institutions with Roman constitutional ones . Severus Alexander , emperor from 222 to 235 , visited Palmyra in 229 .

== == Palmyrene kingdom == ==

The rise of the Sasanian Empire in Persia considerably damaged Palmyrene trade . The Sasanians disbanded Palmyrene colonies in their lands , and began a war against the Roman empire . In an inscription dated to 252 Odaenathus appears bearing the title of exarchos (lord) of Palmyra . The weakness of the Roman empire and the constant Persian danger were probably the reasons behind the Palmyrene council 's decision to elect a lord for the city in order for him to lead a strengthened army . Odaenathus approached Shapur I of Persia to request him to guarantee Palmyrene interests in Persia , but was rebuffed . In 260 the Emperor Valerian fought Shapur at the Battle of Edessa , but was defeated and captured . One of Valerian 's officers , Macrianus Major , his sons Quietus and Macrianus , and the prefect Balista rebelled against Valerian 's son Gallienus , usurping imperial power in Syria .

== == Persian wars == ==

Odaenathus formed an army of Palmyrenes and Syrian peasants against Shapur . According to the Augustan History , Odaenathus declared himself king prior to the battle . The Palmyrene leader won a decisive victory near the banks of the Euphrates later in 260 forcing the Persians to retreat . In 261 Odaenathus marched against the remaining usurpers in Syria , defeating and killing Quietus and Balista . As a reward , he received the title Imperator Totius Orientis (" Governor of the East ") from

Gallienus , and ruled Syria , Mesopotamia , Arabia and Anatolia 's eastern regions as the imperial representative . Palmyra itself remained officially part of the empire but Palmyrene inscriptions started to describe it as a " metrocolonia " , indicating that the city 's status was higher than normal Roman colonias . In practice , Palmyra shifted from a provincial city to a de facto allied kingdom .

In 262 Odaenathus launched a new campaign against Shapur , reclaiming the rest of Roman Mesopotamia (most importantly , the cities of Nisibis and Carrhae) , sacking the Jewish city of Nehardea , and besieging the Persian capital Ctesiphon . Following his victory , the Palmyrene monarch assumed the title King of Kings . Later , Odaenathus crowned his son Hairan I as co @-@ King of Kings near Antioch in 263 .

Although he did not take the Persian capital , Odaenathus drove the Persians out of all Roman lands conquered since the beginning of Shapur 's wars in 252 . In a second campaign , the Palmyrene king defeated the Persians in 266 near Ctesiphon . In 267 , Odaenathus , accompanied by Hairan I , moved north to repel Gothic attacks on Asia Minor . The king and his son were assassinated during their return ; according to the Augustan History and Joannes Zonaras , Odaenathus was killed by a cousin (Zonaras says nephew) named in the History as Maeonius . The Augustan History also says that Maeonius was proclaimed emperor for a brief period before being killed by the soldiers . However , no inscriptions or other evidence exist for Maeonius ' reign and he was probably killed immediately after assassinating Odaenathus .

Odaenathus was succeeded by his son ; the ten @-@ year @-@ old Vaballathus . Zenobia , the mother of the new king , was the de facto ruler and Vaballathus remained in her shadow while she consolidated her power . Gallienus dispatched his prefect Heraclian to command military operations against the Persians , but he was marginalized by Zenobia and returned to the West . The queen was careful not to provoke Rome , claiming for herself and her son the titles held by her husband while guaranteeing the safety of the borders with Persia and pacifying the Tanukhids in Hauran . To protect the borders with Persia , Zenobia fortified different settlements on the Euphrates including the citadels of Halabiye and Zalabiye . Circumstantial evidence exist for confrontations with the Sasanians ; probably in 269 Vaballathus took the title Persicus Maximus (" The great victor in Persia ") and the title might be linked with an unrecorded battle against a Persian army trying to regain control of Northern Mesopotamia .

===== Palmyrene empire =====

Zenobia began her military career in the spring of 270 , during the reign of Claudius Gothicus . Under the pretext of attacking the Tanukhids , she annexed Roman Arabia . This was followed in October by an invasion of Egypt , ending with a Palmyrene victory and Zenobia 's proclamation as queen of Egypt . Palmyra invaded Anatolia the following year , reaching Ankara and the pinnacle of its expansion .

The conquests were made behind a mask of subordination to Rome . Zenobia issued coins in the name of Claudius ' successor Aurelian , with Vaballathus depicted as king ; since Aurelian was occupied with repelling insurgencies in Europe , he permitted the Palmyrene coinage and conferred the royal titles . In late 271 , Vaballathus and his mother assumed the titles of Augustus (emperor) and Augusta .

The following year , Aurelian crossed the Bosphorus and advanced quickly through Anatolia . According to one account , Roman general Marcus Aurelius Probus regained Egypt from Palmyra ; Aurelian entered Issus and headed to Antioch , where he defeated Zenobia in the Battle of Immae . Zenobia was defeated again at the Battle of Emesa , taking refuge in Homs before quickly returning to her capital . When the Romans besieged Palmyra , Zenobia refused their order to surrender in person to the emperor . She escaped east to ask the Persians for help , but was captured by the Romans ; the city capitulated soon afterwards .

===== Later Roman and Byzantine periods =====

Aurelian spared the city and stationed a garrison of 600 archers , led by Sandarion , as a

peacekeeping force . In 273 Palmyra rebelled under the leadership of Septimius Apsaios , declaring Antiochus (a relative of Zenobia) as Augustus . Aurelian marched against Palmyra , razing it to the ground and seizing the most valuable monuments to decorate his Temple of Sol . Palmyrene buildings were smashed , residents massacred and the Temple of Bel pillaged .

Palmyra was reduced to a village without territory . Aurelian repaired the Temple of Bel , and the Legio I Illyricorum was stationed in the city . Shortly before 303 the Camp of Diocletian , a castra in the western part of the city , was built . The 4 @-@ hectare (9 @.@ 9 @-@ acre) camp was a base for the Legio I Illyricorum , which guarded the trade routes around the city .

Palmyra became a Christian city in the decades following its destruction by Aurelian . In late 527 , Justinian I ordered its fortification and the restoration of its churches and public buildings to protect the empire against raids by Lakhmid king Al @-@ Mundhir III ibn al @-@ Nu 'man .

= = = Arab caliphate = = =

Palmyra was annexed by the Rashidun Caliphate after its 634 capture by the Muslim general Khalid ibn al @-@ Walid , who took the city after an 18 @-@ day march by his army through the Syrian Desert from Mesopotamia . By then Palmyra was limited to the Diocletian camp . After the conquest , the city became part of Homs Province .

= = = Umayyad and early Abbasid periods = = =

Palmyra prospered as part of the Umayyad Caliphate , and its population grew . It was a key stop on the East @-@ West trade route , with a large souq (market) , built by the Umayyads , who also commissioned part of the Temple of Bel as a mosque . During this period , Palmyra was a stronghold of the Banu Kalb tribe . After being defeated by Marwan II during a civil war in the caliphate , Umayyad contender Sulayman ibn Hisham fled to the Banu Kalb in Palmyra , but eventually pledged allegiance to Marwan in 744 ; Palmyra continued to oppose Marwan until the surrender of the Banu Kalb leader al @-@ Abrash al @-@ Kalbi in 745 . That year , Marwan ordered the city 's walls demolished .

In 750 a revolt , led by Majza 'a ibn al @-@ Kawthar and Umayyad pretender Abu Muhammad al @-@ Sufyani , against the new Abbasid Caliphate swept across Syria ; the tribes in Palmyra supported the rebels . After his defeat Abu Muhammad took refuge in the city , which withstood an Abbasid assault long enough to allow him to escape .

= = = Decentralization = = =

Abbasid power dwindled during the 10th century , when the empire disintegrated and was divided among a number of vassals . Most of the new rulers acknowledged the caliph as their nominal sovereign , a situation which continued until the Mongol destruction of the Abbasid Caliphate in 1258 .

In 955 Sayf al @-@ Dawla , the Hamdanid prince of Aleppo , defeated the nomads near the city , and built a kasbah (fortress) in response to campaigns by the Byzantine emperors Nikephoros II Phokas and John I Tzimiskes . After the early @-@ 11th @-@ century Hamdanid collapse , Palmyra was controlled by the successor Mirdasid dynasty . Earthquakes devastated the city in 1068 and 1089 . The Mirdasids were followed in the second half of the 11th century by Khalaf of the Mala 'ib tribe , centered in Homs . In the 1070s Syria was conquered by the Seljuk Empire , whose sultan Malik @-@ Shah I expelled the Mala 'ib and imprisoned Khalaf in 1090 . Khalaf 's lands were given to Malik @-@ Shah 's brother , Tutush I , who gained his independence after his brother 's 1092 death and established a cadet branch of the Seljuk dynasty in Syria .

During the early 12th century Palmyra was ruled by Toghtekin , the Burid atabeg of Damascus , who appointed his nephew governor . Toghtekin 's nephew was killed by rebels , and the atabeg retook the city in 1126 . Palmyra was given to Toghtekin 's grandson , Shihab @-@ ud @-@ din Mahmud , who was replaced by governor Yusuf ibn Firuz when Shihab @-@ ud @-@ din Mahmud

returned to Damascus after his father Taj al @-@ Muluk Buri succeeded Toghtekin . The Burids transformed the Temple of Bel into a citadel in 1132 , fortifying the city , and transferring it to the Bin Qaraja family three years later in exchange for Homs .

During the mid @-@ 12th century , Palmyra was ruled by the Zengid king Nur ad @-@ Din Mahmud . It became part of the district of Homs , which was given as a fiefdom to the Ayyubid general Shirkuh in 1167 and confiscated after his death in 1169 . Homs was annexed by the Ayyubid sultanate in 1174 ; the following year , Saladin gave Homs (including Palmyra) to his cousin Nasir al @-@ Din Muhammad as a fiefdom . After Saladin 's death , the Ayyubid realm was divided and Palmyra was given to Nasir al @-@ Din Muhammad 's son Al @-@ Mujahid Shirkuh II (who built the castle of Palmyra known as Fakhr @-@ al @-@ Din al @-@ Maani Castle around 1230) . Five years before , Syrian geographer Yaqut al @-@ Hamawi described Palmyra 's residents as living in " a castle surrounded by a stone wall " .

= = = Mamluk period = = =

Palmyra was used as a refuge by Shirkuh II 's grandson , al @-@ Ashraf Musa , who allied himself with the Mongol king Hulagu Khan and fled after the Mongol defeat in the 1260 Battle of Ain Jalut against the Mamluks . Al @-@ Ashraf Musa asked the Mamluk sultan Qutuz for pardon and was accepted as a vassal . Al @-@ Ashraf Musa died in 1263 without an heir , bringing the Homs district under direct Mamluk rule .

= = = Al Fadl principality = = =

The Al Fadl clan (a branch of the Tayy tribe) declared its loyalty to the Mamluks , and in 1281 , Prince Issa bin Muhanna of the Al Fadl was appointed lord of Palmyra by sultan Qalawun . Issa was succeeded in 1284 by his son Muhanna bin Issa who was imprisoned by sultan al @-@ Ashraf Khalil in 1293 , and restored two years later by sultan al @-@ Adil Kitbugha . Muhanna declared his loyalty to Öljaitü of the Ilkhanate in 1312 and was dismissed and replaced with his brother Fadl by sultan an @-@ Nasir Muhammad . Although Muhanna was forgiven by an @-@ Nasir and restored in 1317 , he and his tribe were expelled in 1320 for his continued relations with the Ilkhanate and he was replaced by tribal chief Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr .

Muhanna was forgiven and restored by an @-@ Nasir in 1330 ; he remained loyal to the sultan until his death in 1335 , when he was succeeded by his son . Contemporary historian Ibn Fadlallah al @-@ Omari described the city as having " vast gardens , flourishing trades and bizarre monuments " . The Al Fadl clan protected the trade routes and villages from Bedouin raids , raiding other cities and fighting among themselves . The Mamluks intervened militarily several times , dismissing , imprisoning or expelling its leaders . In 1400 Palmyra was attacked by Timur , who took 200 @-@, 000 sheep and destroyed the city . The Fadl prince Nu 'air escaped the battle against Timur and later fought Jakam , the sultan of Aleppo . Nu 'air was captured , taken to Aleppo and executed in 1406 ; this , according to Ibn Hajar al @-@ Asqalani , ended the Al Fadl clan 's power .

= = = Ottoman and later periods = = =

Syria became part of the Ottoman Empire in 1516 , and Palmyra was incorporated into Damascus Eyalet as the center of an administrative district (sanjak) . During the Ottoman era , Palmyra was a small village in the courtyard of the Temple of Bel . After 1568 the Ottomans appointed the Lebanese prince Ali bin Musa Harfush as governor of Palmyra 's sanjak , dismissing him in 1584 for treason .

In 1630 Palmyra came under the authority of another Lebanese prince , Fakhr @-@ al @-@ Din II , who renovated Shirkuh II 's castle (which became known as Fakhr @-@ al @-@ Din al @-@ Maani Castle) . The prince fell from grace with the Ottomans in 1633 and lost control of the village , which remained a separate sanjak until it was absorbed by Zor Sanjak in 1857 . The village became home to an Ottoman garrison to control the Bedouin in 1867 .

Palmyra regained some of its importance at the beginning of the 20th century as a station for caravans , and its revival was aided by the advent of motorized transport . In 1918 , as World War I was ending , the Royal Air Force built an airfield for two planes , and in November the Ottomans retreated from Zor Sanjak without a fight . The Syrian Emirate 's army entered Deir ez @-@ Zor on 4 December , and Zor Sanjak became part of Syria . In 1919 , as the British and French argued over the borders of the planned mandates , the British permanent military representative to the Supreme War Council Henry Wilson suggested adding Palmyra to the British mandate . However , the British general Edmund Allenby persuaded his government to abandon this plan . Syria (including Palmyra) became part of the French Mandate after Syria 's defeat in the Battle of Maysalun on 24 July 1920 .

As Palmyra gained importance to French efforts to pacify the Syrian Desert , a base was constructed in the village near the Temple of Bel in 1921 . In 1929 the general director of antiquities in Syria , Henri Arnold Seyrig , began excavating the ruins and convinced the villagers to move to a new , French @-@ built village next to the site . The relocation was completed in 1932 ; ancient Palmyra was ready for excavation as its villagers settled into the new village of Tadmur .

= = = Syrian Civil War = = =

As a result of the Syrian Civil War , Palmyra experienced widespread looting and damage by combatants . During the summer of 2012 , concerns about looting in the museum and the site increased when an amateur video of Syrian soldiers carrying funerary stones was posted . However , according to France 24 's report , " From the information gathered , it is impossible to determine whether pillaging was taking place . " The following year the façade of the Temple of Bel sustained a large hole from mortar fire , and colonnade columns have been damaged by shrapnel . According to Maamoun Abdulkarim , director of antiquities and museums at the Syrian Ministry of Culture , the Syrian Army positioned its troops in some archaeological @-@ site areas , while Syrian opposition fighters positioned themselves in gardens around the city .

On 13 May 2015 , ISIL launched an attack on the modern town of Tadmur , sparking fears that the iconoclastic group would destroy the adjacent ancient site of Palmyra . On 21 May , some artifacts were transported from the Palmyra museum to Damascus for safekeeping . A number of Greco @-@ Roman busts , jewelry , and other objects looted from the museum have been found on the international market . ISIL forces entered Palmyra on the same day . Local residents reported that the Syrian air force bombed the site on 13 June , damaging the northern wall close to the Temple of Baalshamin . Since at least 27 May , Palmyra 's theatre was used as a place of public executions of ISIL opponents . A video released by ISIL shows the killing of 20 prisoners by teenage male executioners in front of hundreds of men and boys . On 18 August , Palmyra 's retired antiquities chief Khaled al @-@ Asaad was beheaded by ISIL after being tortured for a month to extract information about the city and its treasures ; al @-@ Asaad refused to give any information to his captors .

Syrian government forces backed by Russian airstrikes recaptured Palmyra on 27 March 2016 after intense fighting against ISIL fighters . According to initial reports , the damage to the archaeological site was less extensive than anticipated , with numerous structures still standing . Following the recapture of the city , Russian de @-@ mining teams began clearing mines planted by ISIL prior to their retreat .

= = Government = =

From the beginning of its history to the first century AD Palmyra was a petty sheikhdom , and by the first century BC a Palmyrene identity began to develop . During the first half of the first century AD , Palmyra incorporated some of the institutions of a Greek city (polis) ; the concept of citizenship (demos) appears in an inscription , dated to 10 AD , describing the Palmyrenes as a community . In 74 AD , an inscription mentions the city 's boule (senate) . The tribal role in Palmyra is debated ; during the first century , four treasurers representing the four tribes seems to have partially

controlled the administration but their role became ceremonial by the second century and power rested in the hands of the council .

The Palmyrene council consisted of about six hundred members of the local elite (such as the elders or heads of wealthy families or clans) , representing the city 's four @-@ quarters . The council , headed by a president , managed civic responsibilities ; it supervised public works (including the construction of public buildings) , approved expenditures , collected taxes , and appointed two archons (lords) each year . Palmyra 's military was led by strategoi (generals) appointed by the council . Roman provincial authority set and approved Palmyra 's tariff structure , but the provincial interference in local government was kept minimal as the empire sought to ensure the continuous success of Palmyrene trade most beneficial to Rome . An imposition of direct provincial administration would have jeopardized Palmyra 's ability to conduct its trading activities in the East , especially in Parthia .

With the elevation of Palmyra to a colonia around 213 ? 216 , the city ceased being subject to Roman provincial governors and taxes . Palmyra incorporated Roman institutions into its system while keeping many of its former ones . The council remained , and the strategos designated one of two annually @-@ elected magistrates . This duumviri implemented the new colonial constitution , replacing the archons . Palmyra 's political scene changed with the rise of Odaenathus and his family ; an inscription dated to 251 describes Odaenathus ' son Hairan I as " Ras " (lord) of Palmyra (exarch in the Greek section of the inscription) and another inscription dated to 252 describes Odaenathus with the same title . Odaenathus was probably elected by the council as exarch , which was an unusual title in the Roman empire and was not part of the traditional Palmyrene governance institutions . Whether Odaenathus ' title indicated a military or a priestly position is unknown , but the military role is more likely . By 257 Odaenathus was known as a consularis , possibly the legatus of the province of Phoenice . In 258 Odaenathus began extending his political influence , taking advantage of regional instability caused by Sasanian aggression ; this culminated in the Battle of Edessa , Odaenathus ' royal elevation and mobilization of troops , which made Palmyra a kingdom .

The monarchy continued the council and most civic institutions , permitting the election of magistrates until 264 . In the absence of the monarch , the city was administered by a viceroy . Although governors of the eastern Roman provinces under Odaenathus ' control were still appointed by Rome , the king had overall authority . During Zenobia 's rebellion , governors were appointed by the queen .

Not all Palmyrenes accepted the dominion of the royal family ; a senator , Septimius Haddudan , appears in a later Palmyrene inscription as aiding Aurelian 's armies during the 273 rebellion . After the Roman destruction of the city , Palmyra was ruled directly by Rome , and then by a succession of other rulers , including the Burids and Ayyubids , and subordinate Bedouin chiefs ? primarily the Fadl family , who governed for the Mamluks .

= = = Military = = =

Due to its military character and efficiency in battle , Palmyra was described by Irfan Shahîd as the " Sparta among the cities of the Orient , Arab and other , and even its gods were represented dressed in military uniforms . " Palmyra 's army protected the city and its economy , helping extend Palmyrene authority beyond the city walls and protecting the countryside 's desert trade routes . The city had a substantial military ; Zabdibel commanded a force of 10 @,@ 000 in the third century BC , and Zenobia led an army of 70 @,@ 000 in the Battle of Emesa . Soldiers were recruited from the city and its territories , spanning several thousand square kilometers from the outskirts of Homs to the Euphrates valley . Non @-@ Palmyrene soldiers were also recruited ; a Nabatean cavalryman is recorded in 132 as serving in a Palmyrene unit stationed at Anah . Palmyra 's recruiting system is unknown ; the city might have selected and equipped the troops and the strategoi led , trained and disciplined them .

The strategoi were appointed by the council with the approval of Rome . The royal army in the mid 3rd century AD was under the leadership of the monarch aided by generals , and was modeled on

the Sasanians in arms and tactics . The Palmyrenes were noted archers . They used infantry while a heavily armored cavalry (*clibanarii*) constituted the main attacking force . Palmyra 's infantry was armed with swords , lances and small round shields ; the *clibanarii* were fully armored (including their horses) , and used heavy spears (*kontos*) 3 @. @ 65 metres (12 @. @ 0 ft) long without shields .

= = = Relations with Rome = = =

Citing the Palmyrenes ' combat skills in large , sparsely populated areas , the Romans formed a Palmyrene *auxilia* to serve in the Imperial Roman army . Vespasian reportedly had 8 @, @ 000 Palmyrene archers in Judea , and Trajan established the first Palmyrene *Auxilia* in 116 (a camel cavalry unit , *Ala I Ulpia dromedariorum Palmyrenorum*) . Palmyrene units were deployed throughout the Roman Empire , serving in Dacia late in Hadrian 's reign , and at El Kantara in Numidia and Moesia under Antoninus Pius . During the late second century Rome formed the *Cohors XX Palmyrenorum* , which was stationed in Dura @- @ Europos .

= = Religion = =

Palmyra 's gods were primarily part of the northwestern Semitic pantheon , with the addition of gods from the Mesopotamian and Arab pantheons . The city 's chief pre @- @ Hellenistic deity was called Bol , an abbreviation of Baal (a northwestern Semitic honorific) . The Babylonian cult of Bel @- @ Marduk influenced the Palmyrene religion and by 217 BC the chief deity 's name was changed to Bel . This did not indicate the replacing of the northwestern Semitic Bol with a Mesopotamian deity , but was a mere change in the name .

Second in importance after the supreme deity , were over sixty ancestral gods of the Palmyrene clans . Palmyra had unique deities , such as the god of justice and Efqa 's guardian Yarhibol , the sun god Malakbel , and the moon god Aglibol . Palmyrenes worshiped regional deities , including the greater Levantine gods Astarte , Baal @- @ hamon , Baalshamin and Atargatis ; the Babylonian gods Nabu and Nergal , and the Arab Azizos , Arsu , ?ams and Al @- @ I?t .

The deities worshiped in the countryside were depicted as camel or horse riders and bore Arab names . The nature of those deities is uncertain as only names are known , most importantly Abgal . The Palmyrene pantheon included *ginnaye* (some were given the designation " Gad ") , a group of lesser deities popular in the countryside , who were similar to the Arab *jinn* and the Roman *genius* . *Ginnaye* were believed to have the appearance and behavior of humans , similar to Arab *jinn* . Unlike *jinn* , however , the *ginnaye* could not possess or injure humans . Their role was similar to the Roman *genius* : tutelary deities who guarded individuals and their caravans , cattle and villages .

Although the Palmyrenes worshiped their deities as individuals , some were associated with other gods . Bel had Astarte @- @ Belti as his consort , and formed a triple deity with Aglibol and Yarhibol (who became a sun god in his association with Bel) . Malakbel was part of many associations , pairing with Gad Taimi and Aglibol , and forming a triple deity with Baalshamin and Aglibol . Palmyra hosted an *Akitu* (spring festival) each Nisan . Each of the city 's four @- @ quarters had a sanctuary for a deity considered ancestral to the resident tribe ; Malakbel and Aglibol 's sanctuary was in the Komare quarter . The Baalshamin sanctuary was in the Ma 'zin quarter , the Arsu sanctuary in the Mattabol quarter , and the Atargatis sanctuary in the fourth tribe 's quarter .

Palmyra 's paganism was replaced with Christianity as the religion spread across the Roman Empire , and a bishop was reported in the city by 325 . Although most temples became churches , the Temple of Al @- @ I?t was destroyed in 385 at the order of Maternus Cynegius (the eastern praetorian prefect) . After the Muslim conquest in 634 Islam gradually replaced Christianity , and the last known bishop of Palmyra was consecrated in 818 .

= = Economy = =

Palmyra 's economy before and at the beginning of the Roman period was based on agriculture ,

pastoralism , trade , and serving as a rest station for the caravans which sporadically crossed the desert . By the end of the first century BC , the city had a mixed economy based on agriculture , pastoralism , taxation , and , most importantly , the caravan trade .

Taxation was an important source of revenue for the Palmyrene government . Caravaneers paid taxes in the building known as the Tariff Court , where a tax law dating to 137 AD was exhibited . The law regulated the tariffs paid by the merchants for goods sold at the internal market or exported from the city . Classicist Andrew M. Smith II suggests most land in Palmyra was owned by the city , which collected grazing taxes . The oasis had about 1 @, @ 000 hectares (2 @, @ 500 acres) of irrigable land , which surrounded the city . The Palmyrenes constructed an extensive irrigation system in the northern mountains that consisted of reservoirs and channels to capture and store the occasional rainfall . The countryside was intensively planted with olive , fig , pistachio and barley . However , agriculture could not support the population and food was imported .

After Palmyra 's destruction in 273 , it became a market for villagers and nomads from the surrounding area . The city regained some of its prosperity during the Umayyad era , indicated by the discovery of a large Umayyad souq in the colonnaded street . Palmyra was a minor trading center until the Timurid destruction in 1400 , which reduced it to a settlement on the desert border whose inhabitants herded and cultivated small plots for vegetables and corn .

= = = Commerce = = =

During the first centuries AD , Palmyra 's main trade route ran east to the Euphrates , where it connected to the Silk Road . The route then ran south along the river toward the port of Charax Spasinu on the Persian Gulf , where Palmyrene ships traveled back and forth to India . Goods were imported from India , China and Transoxiana , and exported west to Emesa (or Antioch) then the Mediterranean ports , from which they were distributed throughout the Roman Empire . In addition to the usual route some Palmyrene merchants used the Red Sea , probably as a result of the Roman ? Parthian Wars . Goods were carried overland from the seaports to a Nile port , and then taken to the Egyptian Mediterranean ports for export . Inscriptions attesting a Palmyrene presence in Egypt date to the reign of Hadrian .

Since Palmyra was not on the Silk Road (which followed the Euphrates) , the Palmyrenes secured the desert route passing their city . They connected it to the Euphrates valley , providing water and shelter . The Palmyrene route was used almost exclusively by the city 's merchants , who maintained a presence in many cities , including Dura @-@ Europos in 33 BC , Babylon by 19 AD , Seleucia by 24 AD , Dendera , Coptos , Bahrain , the Indus River Delta , Merv and Rome .

The caravan trade depended on patrons and merchants . Patrons owned the land on which the caravan animals were raised , providing animals and guards for the merchants . The lands were located in the numerous villages of the Palmyrene countryside . Although merchants used the patrons to conduct business , their roles often overlapped and a patron would sometimes lead a caravan . Commerce made Palmyra and its merchants among the wealthiest in the region . Some caravans were financed by a single merchant , such as Male ' Agrippa (who financed Hadrian 's visit in 129 and the 139 rebuilding of the Temple of Bel) . The primary income @-@ generating trade good was silk , which was exported from the East to the West . Other exported goods included jade , muslin , spices , ebony , ivory and precious stones . For its domestic market Palmyra imported variety of goods including slaves , prostitutes , olive oil , dyed goods , myrrh and perfume .

= = Excavations = =

During the Middle Ages Palmyra was largely forgotten by the West , although it was visited by travelers such as Pietro Della Valle (between 1616 and 1625) , Jean @-@ Baptiste Tavernier (in 1638) and many Swedish and German explorers . In 1678 a group of English merchants visited the city , and its first scholarly description appeared in a 1705 book by Abednego Seller . In 1751 , an expedition led by Robert Wood and James Dawkins studied Palmyra 's architecture ; visits by travelers and antiquarians continued , including one made by Lady Hester Stanhope in 1813 . In

1881 , the " Palmyrene Tariff " , an inscribed stone slab from 137 AD in Greek and Palmyrene detailing import and export taxation , was discovered by prince Abamelek @-@ Lazarev in the Tariff Court . It has been described as " one of the most important single items of evidence for the economic life of any part of the Roman Empire " . In 1901 , the slab was gifted by the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II to the Russian Tsar and is now in the Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg .

Palmyra 's first excavations were conducted in 1902 by Otto Puchstein and in 1917 by Theodor Wiegand . In 1929 , French general director of antiquities of Syria and Lebanon Henri Arnold Seyrig began large @-@ scale excavation of the site ; interrupted by World War II , it resumed soon after the war 's end . Seyrig started with the Temple of Bel in 1929 and between 1939 and 1940 he excavated the Agora . Daniel Schlumberger conducted excavations in the Palmyrene northwest countryside in 1934 and 1935 where he studied different local sanctuaries in the Palmyrene villages . From 1954 to 1956 , a Swiss expedition organized by UNESCO excavated the Temple of Baalshamin . Since 1958 , the site has been excavated by the Syrian Directorate @-@ General of Antiquities , and Polish expeditions led by many archaeologists including Kazimierz Michałowski (until 1980) and Michael Gawlikowski (until 2011) .

The Polish expedition concentrated its work in the Camp of Diocletian while the Syrian Directorate @-@ General of Antiquities excavated the Temple of Nabu . Most of the hypogea were excavated jointly by the Polish expedition and the Syrian Directorate , while the area of Efqā was excavated by Jean Starcky and Jafar al @-@ Hassani . The Temple of Baal @-@ hamon was discovered by Robert du Mesnil du Buisson in the 1970s . The Palmyrene irrigation system was discovered in 2008 by Jørgen Christian Meyer who researched the Palmyrene countryside through ground inspections and satellite images . Most of Palmyra still remains unexplored especially the residential quarters in the north and south while the necropolis has been thoroughly excavated by the Directorate and the Polish expedition . Excavation expeditions left Palmyra in 2011 due to the Syrian Civil War .

In 1980 , the historic site including the necropolis outside the walls was declared a World Heritage Site by the UNESCO . In November 2010 the Austrian media manager Helmut Thoma admitted looting a Palmyrene grave in 1980 , stealing architectural pieces for his home ; German and Austrian archaeologists protested against the theft .

= = Destruction by ISIL = =

According to eyewitnesses , on 23 May 2015 the militants destroyed the Lion of Al @-@ l?t and other statues . The militant group destroyed the Temple of Baalshamin on 23 August 2015 according to Abdulkarim and activists , while the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights claimed that the destruction took place one month earlier .

The Syrian Observatory announced that on 30 August 2015 , ISIL destroyed the Temple of Bel ; according to eyewitnesses , only the exterior walls remain . On 31 August 2015 , the United Nations confirmed the temple was destroyed . It became known on 4 September 2015 that ISIL had destroyed three of the best preserved tower tombs including the Tower of Elahbel . On 5 October 2015 , news media reported ISIL is destroying buildings with no religious meaning , including the Arch of Triumph .

In response to the destruction , on 21 October 2015 , Creative Commons started an online repository of three @-@ dimensional images published into the public domain to digitally reconstruct Palmyra .