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An Āghā, a House and the City

The Debbané Museum Project and the Ottoman City of Saida

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The Debbané Foundation in cooperation with the Orient-Institute in Beirut is carrying out a comparative project to document public and domestic architecture in Saida with reference to other buildings of the region – especially buildings in Syria and Lebanon. Besides Stefan Weber from the OIB, Ralph Bodenstein (building archaeology, the history of the 19th and early 20th century) and Beshr al-Barri (drawing and survey) are currently working on this project. Marianne Boqvist (building archaeology, archival works) joined us during our first campaigns. Our aim

is to document the Palais Debbané, the city of Saida, as well as comparable architecture of Ottoman times in the Lebanese Mountains. The Qaṣr Debbané in Saida is one of the most crucial historical monuments on the Lebanese coast and was recorded as an historical monument in 1968. Founded in 1134/1721-22 as a palace of a local notable, a certain 'Alī Āghā Ḥammūd, it reflects the history of Lebanon over the last three centuries. The Debbané family bought this house probably in the early 19th century and renovated it in the early 20th century keeping up with the latest fashion of the day.

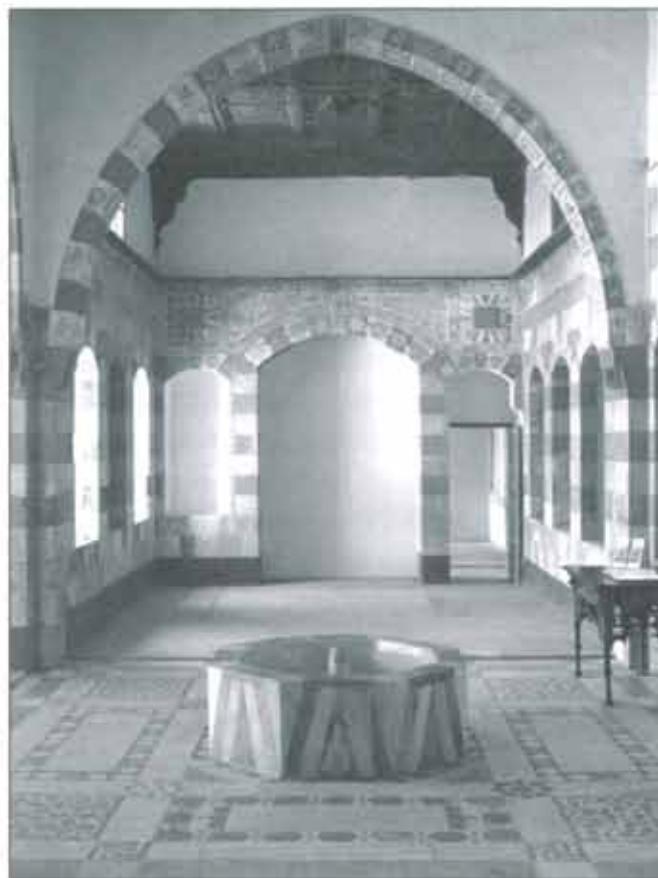


Fig. 1: The qā'a of the Qaṣr Debbané

To protect this outstanding house the Debbané Foundation seeks to establish a museum which would document the very many aspects of urban life and architecture and act as a cultural center for recording valuable information on the history of this house, Saida and the urban heritage of the region. Historical town centers in the Arab world are in urgent need of a re-evaluation, and only intense efforts of the local communities can save them from decay. The Lebanese Civil War and the general economic and social crises in the Middle East have turned these outstanding sites of human civilization into places of social crises. The lack of taking responsibility for the direct urban surrounding has resulted in neglecting the urban environment as a whole. This is changing these days and communities are now inquiring information about their past. This project tries to enable and enhance the identification of the cities' past by providing the following information and by re-establishing a direct link to it.

The focus of the OIB research group was on the history of the Qaṣr Debbané itself, its building (building archaeology), its usage throughout the centuries (18th to 20th centuries), and its foundation as a *waqf* (foundation)

in and on the city of Saida itself. The Debbané foundation sponsored the research, which will be published at a later stage. This article will focus exclusively on the 18th century house.

The City of Saida

In the 18th century – the century during which the Qaṣr Debbané was built – Saida was the capital of the Ottoman province being given the same name as the city Saida itself. Regarding our recent surveys one can say that the city of Saida is in its present historical structure a more or less pure Ottoman city. This is in fact the contrary concerning Tripoli, which is famous for its monuments from the Mamluk period and is thus surprising because Saida was once an important Phoenician commercial city which saw the shift of various rulers such as the Egyptians, Assyrians and Persians, and was since 64 B.C. part of the Roman Empire. Around the year 6 after Hijra /637 AD, Yazīd ibn Abī Sufyān and his Arab troops seized the town from the Byzantines, under whom the city had been the seat of a bishop. However, from these periods onwards as well as from the first centuries of Islamic rule (Umayyad, Abbasid, Tulunid, Fatimid, and Saljuq), no remains are visible in the city. They are to be found buried under the many layers of present-day structures, especially at the site of the land castle. The oldest remains, the sea castle, date back to the Crusader period. Besieged in 501/1107, Saida was occupied by the Crusaders in 504/1110 or 505/1111. After a brief Ayyubid interregnum (583/1187–625/1228) the last decades of the 13th century saw the Mamluks from Egypt expelling the Crusaders from the Levantine coast and in 690/1291 Saida was captured under the command of Sultan al-Ashraf Khalīl. During almost two centuries of constant wars and sieges, the cities in Bilād al-Shām, especially on the coast, were severely damaged and needed thus considerable reconstruction work.

The Mamluks re-founded the city of Tripoli in 693/1293, while Saida was totally neglected as a city.

However, this changed after the arrival of the Ottomans in 1516. The very change came, as it seems, after the middle of the 16th century. Saida was not anymore on the uncertain border of the empire, but as an Ottoman port city laying on one of the main communication lines of the empire: the Mediterranean. Saida became the main harbor city of southern Syria and was literally rebuilt. This seemed to be a conscious reinforcement of the eastern Mediterranean trade routs. Important figures of the Ottoman state, like Sokollu Mehmed Pasha and Kūçūk Ahmet Pasha invested considerable work in the city's reconstruction. The most impressive building of that time, the Khān al-Franj, was founded around 1560 by the famous Ottoman politician Sokollu Mehmed Pasha (d. 1579), Grand Vizier from 1565 to 1579. This *khān* is generally wrongly attributed to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Ma'nī (1590-1635) and was first known by the name Khān Ibrāhīm Khān. Ibrāhīm Khān (d. after 1031/1621-2) the son of Sultan Selim II's daughter Esmakhan Sultan (d. 993/1585) and Mehmet Sokollu Pasha was the *mutawallī* of his father's waqfs. This fact does thus clearly identify Muḥammad Bāshā ibn Jamāl al-Dīn Sinān as founder of the famous *waqf* in Aleppo (dated 982/1574 and translated by al-Ghazzī into Arabic). Sokollu Mehmed's father, an administrator of a *waqf* in Bosnia was

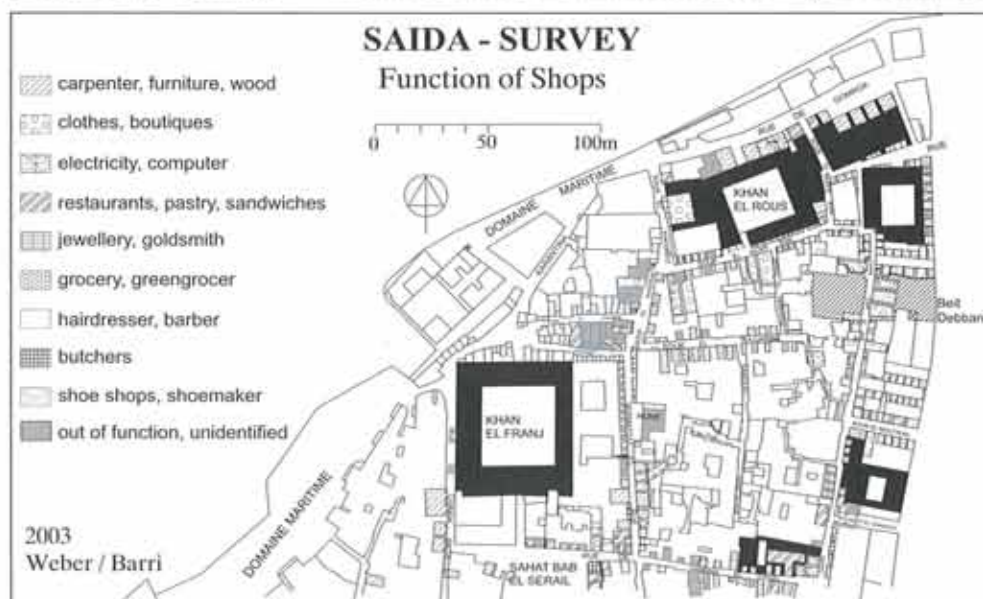


Fig. 2: Map of bazaar shops in Saida, extract

called Jemal ül-Din Sinan Beg after he had converted to Islam. Concerning the *waqfiya* in Aleppo next to the Khān al-Jumruk '*a new khan on the shore in the quarter of the sea in Saida*' belonged to the *waqf* of Sokollu Mehmed Pasha.

However, there is further evidence that Saida started to develop in the second half of the 16th century. During this period and at the turn of the 17th century when Fakhr ad-Dīn made Saida his winter residence and when the Ottomans finally made Saida a provincial capital in the 1660 the city boomed impressively. Saida became the second town in southern Bilād al-Shām after Damascus and was closely connected to it. It is quite remarkable how the city developed and flourished during the Ottoman centuries. In the late 16th century Saida was only counting 2.500 up to 3.000 inhabitants. This number was rising swiftly up to 6.000 to 7.000 in the middle of the 17th century, while one hundred years later around 9.000 to 11.000 people were living in Saida.

The Ottoman re-urbanisation of Saida is closely connected to its role as a harbor city and the foundation of a commercial infrastructure. All the *khans* and as far as one can judge, all the *sūqs*, date from Ottoman times and belong to the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. To mention but a few, there are the Khān al-Franj (1560), the Khān al-Ruzz (early 17th century), the Qayṣāriyya (early 17th century), the Khān Dabbāghā (missing today), and the Khān al-Qishla (first known as Khān al-Ḥummuṣ) which was built by the family of 'Alī Āghā Ḥammūd in 1134/1721-22-the same year as Qaṣr Debbanē. They are located close to the harbor and stress its importance concerning the commercial life of the city which was the main reason for Saida's resurrection from its ruins. The integration into the immense trade zone of the Ottoman Empire and, through this, the re-establishment of wider commercial contacts with the Mediterranean and Europe, led to an economic boom of the city and to large commercial building investments.

After the first wave of commercial and public building investment during the last decades of the 16th century and after the rule of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Ma'nī, it is especially the 18th century who had a strong input on the urban deve-

lopment of the old city of Saida. Many houses, commercial buildings and bathhouses were constructed in the first half of the 18th century. The Qaṣr Debbanē deserves a special place within that. It was built as part of a *waqf* of the family of 'Alī Ḥammūd, one of the most powerful personalities of his time. The Ḥammūd family seemed to have arrived to Saida sometime during the 16th or 17th century. A certain Katkhudā Muṣṭafā Ḥammūd had been already holding a quite powerful position during the 17th century and the Khān al-Yahūd and the Kikhiyā Mosque were parts of his *waqf*. Especially during the first half of the 18th century the Ḥammūds played a central role in the city and constructed several outstanding monuments. It is most likely that the father of 'Alī Āghā, Muṣṭafā Āghā, had ordered the construction of a *madrasa* to the Bahrī mosque (1126/1713-14) and the Ḥammām al-Jadīd in the same year. He had the position as tax farmer of Saida – an important and lucrative position that remained in the family for many years. Thus the many estates of the Ḥammūd family and the splendor of their houses seem to be a direct result of the legalization of the lifelong and hereditary right of tax-farming during 1695. Thus also 'Alī Āghā became the tax farmer of the port of Saida – in the years when the house was under construction, i.e. in the early 1720s. To the northern side of the house the Khān al-Ishle (al-Qishla / al-Ḥummuṣ dated 1134/1721-22) was built by the family of the Āghā most likely together with the Sūq al-Bazarkān below. 'Alī Āghā's son Aḥmad followed his father's footsteps in office. It was probably him who had built the second Ḥammūd house and the Ḥammām al-Ward in 1143/1730-31. It is interesting to observe that most of these buildings do follow the main north-south axis and since we have found no remains of a city wall in this area, it may be that we are dealing here with a town enlargement to the East – a question that we will pursue further during our next campaign. However, historiographically speaking, the city of Saida matches quite well the model of Ottoman periodisation. The classical rule of the Empire during the 16th century saw large commercial-infrastructure investment in Saida and in other cities as well. During the age of A'yān, which sees local notables as the main forces of urban economy and politics during the 18th century, Saida was controlled regarding urban politics, economy and urbanism by the most influential A'yān family, the Ḥammūds.

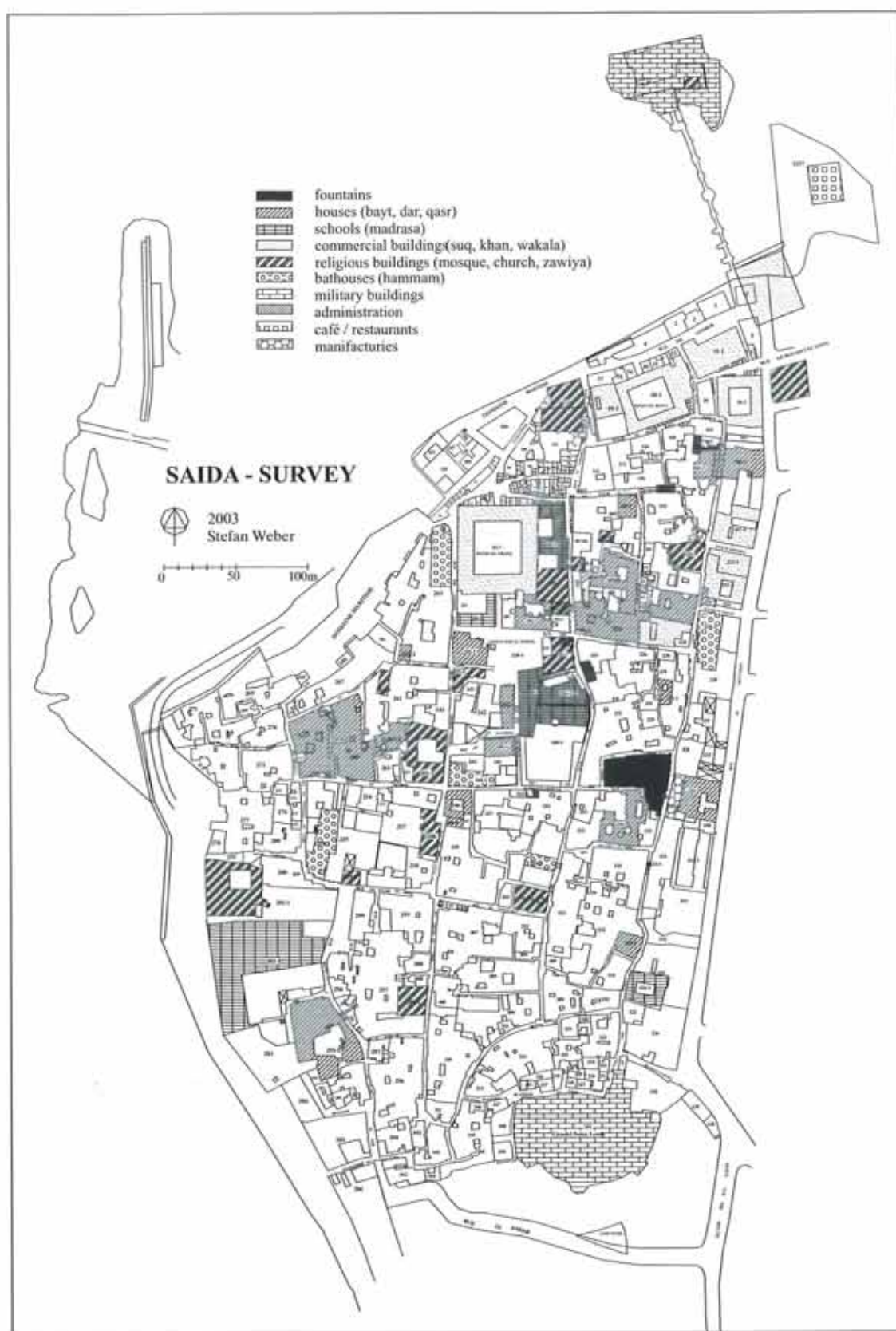


Fig. 3: Surveyed buildings in Saida

But Saida was since the late 18th century on decline – and with the city's splendor went the fortune of the Ḥammūd family. In the 1770s Zāhir al-'Umar shifted the center of the province of Saida, from the city of Saida, to Acre and under the rule of Aḥmad Pasha al-Jazzār (1775-1804) this change became irreversible. His successors Sulaymān Pasha and 'Abdallāh Pasha were also based in Acre until the rise of Beirut that began in the 1820s and especially in the 1830s under the Egyptian interregnum of Ibrāhīm Pasha (1831-1840). Ibrāhīm Pasha, the son of the famous and independent "Ottoman governor" of Cairo, Muḥammad 'Alī Pasha (1805-1849), started in Bilād al-Shām – like his father in Egypt had done – with an ample program of reforms. This period, which is marked by deep cuts in the established military force and economic and administrative machineries, cut Saida off the main trade routes. Modern times became more apparent in other harbor cities and societies of the region. In the 1830s first steamboats from Europe arrived in Beirut and thus foreign trade with Europe had started and a cultural exchange between the East and the West was much intensified. The history of the 19th century in Lebanon is closely connected with the dynamic growth of Beirut, while Saida fell in a long sleep.

The house of the Āghā

The Qaṣr Debbanē is still today situated in the middle of the commercial activities, as our survey of the city's *sūqs*, mapping the use of the shops, clearly shows (Fig. 2). The house is not only on the border line between the modern city and the old town, but as well structurally a part of the traditional *sūq* area. The history of the house was from its very beginning closely connected to the commercial life of Saida and the position of 'Alī Āghā as a tax farmer of the port of the city.

The house shows the different periods of construction work from the 18th century on to the early 20th century. The different building phases established by the team led by Ralph Bodenstein will be published at a later stage. As we could identify so far, the house was entirely newly built in the early 18th century during a phase of reshaping the eastern border of the city, sometime which must have been before the wall and moat of the city. The main *sūq* con-

necting the two citadels was given: it was the shortest way between the oldest structures of the city (the citadels) and all other structures of the 18th century taking this street into account. The houses of 'Alī Āghā (Debbanē) and Aḥmad Āghā (Madrasat 'Ā'isha) as well as the Khān al-Ḥummuṣ (Qishla) were built partially on top of this *sūq*. However, a lot of tales are told about the house in question. One is mentioning Fakhr al-Dīn, because of whom it had apparently been built and that the Italians were responsible for its decoration patterns. Others go even further by suggesting that the existence of a medieval military tower was the origin of the present construction. However all these are far fetched ideas without relying on any profound historical evidence and should therefore not be given too much consideration.

However, it is generally agreed upon that the Arab courtyard house is developed in order to guarantee a maximum feeling of privacy by neglecting any kind of street façade and by accumulating its entire splendor into the interior courtyard. Traditional houses in Middle Eastern cities are built around a courtyard and courtyards tend to be on the ground floor. But in coastal cities of the Bilād al-Shām like Saida, Beirut or Tripoli, the city did not grow *extra muros* and develop large city quarters outside the walls as it did in Aleppo, Damascus and Hama. As a result the city grew vertically. Even if courtyards can be found in Saida on ground level, many houses were constructed on top of large, vaulted substructures as for instance shops, storerooms, *sūqs* or workshops. This is also the case with the Qaṣr Debbanē, where the courtyard is located above the main *sūq* of the city. Privacy seems thus to have been even more guaranteed. Every visitor had to walk up the narrow stairs of the house through a simple portal, which does not at all give any indication of the luxury of the residence. But he must have been impressed when entering the main hall and former courtyard of the house. The richness of the owner was openly displayed on the walls and by the style of the house built according to the latest fashion of the day. Having a closer look at the house I would argue that we are dealing here with a very representative piece of architecture.

Concerning the remains of the 18th century, the reception hall (*qā'a*) was the most representative part of the house

demonstrating a very bourgeoisie style of living. It was here where the Āghā was receiving dignitaries of the town. In an ideal-prototype house the reception hall would have been located in the North on the opposite side of the *īwān*, which in turn should be in the South of the courtyard in order to be protected against the sun. This is neither the case in the Debbané house nor in the second house of the Ḥammūd family, the later Madrasat 'Ā'isha. In both two houses the *qā'a* is directly connected to the *īwān* on its eastern side and orientated on parallel lines to the eastern border of the city; thus giving its outer façade to the street running *extra muros*. The *qā'a* is an outstanding feature in the outer façade emphasized by a well designed *ablaq* façade and a protruding arm of the *qā'a*. This protruding arm was the main section of the *qā'a* (*īwān* / *ṭazar*) where the Āghā was sitting while receiving guests (compare Fig. 6 and Fig. 7). The *qā'a* was meant to be seen, and everyone passing by

the city outside the city wall on his way from Akko to Beirut or to other places on the coast passage, would have noticed, that behind this obvious *ablaq* façade most likely a very important person would invite for receptions.

Representational decoration on the outside wall was still an exception in 18th century cities of Bilād al-Shām. Nevertheless a unique photo of the original and today strongly changed entrance of the Qaṣr al-'Azm (1163/1749-50) in Damascus shows that some houses of very important figures could develop an elaborated street façade (Fig. 4).

However, the main display of architectural decor was inside the house. Houses had a semi-public function and it was the duty of notables of the town to receive guest, discuss business at home or be taken as a referee to assist in solving the daily worries of an urban society. People therefore must have known – at least by news from mouth to mouth – about the splendor of some residences. The *qā'a* built by 'Alī Āghā must have been the talk of the people as its layout and decoration was not known in Saida and its surroundings before the 18th century. Most probably he wanted to build and decorate the main rooms of his house in the latest fashion and thus required workmen from Damascus, the main centre of social and political power during the 18th century in Bilād al-Shām. He did not turn to Istanbul like notables used to do during the 19th and early 20th century. The workshop from Damascus seems to have been employed in several building projects in Saida at this time, even for buildings that were not built by the Ḥammūd family. But the *qā'a* of 'Alī Āghā is the so far earliest known example that follows the model of Damascus. *Qā'as* of 18th century Damascus (like Aleppo) were much formalized in style and shape. While entering a room one comes first to a lower part, the so called '*ataba* (threshold) which often made up between one fifth and one third of the overall space of the *qā'a*. This part, often paved with marble and with a fountain placed in the middle, was the entrance area of the room. On the borders of the '*ataba* the *ṭazar* the second part of the room, rises like a platform of about 20 to 40 cm above the floor level of the '*ataba*. This was the real living place where carpets covered the ground and small benches (*dīwān*) ran around the walls. Several niches offered storage space. Both elements of



Fig. 4: Qaṣr al-'Azm (1163/1749-50), Damascus 1917 (TU Dresden)

the rooms – the *ṭazar* and the *'ataba* – were separated by the step in between and by an arch above the step (*īwān*). This *'ataba* / *ṭazar* arrangement could be doubled or even tripled, so that one would find a *ṭazar* on either two or three sides of the *'ataba*, like in the *qā'a* of the Damascene Bait Jabri (T-shape *qā'a*). This was the case in the Qaṣr Debbané as well and one has to imagine the *qā'a* as repre-

ous hindrance. How to put in large cupboards, chairs and tables? In the Qaṣr Debbané, like in many other houses, the *ṭazars* were cut out and all the floors were given the same level.

It was the *qā'a* where 'Alī Āghā – one of the most influential personalities in the city and province of Saida at his time (especially in times of change of the governor) – was sitting and receiving guests, for example the French consul who was his friend and was living not far away next to the Khān al-Franj. The French consul describes in 1727 that "(...) Aly Aga le douanier, mon très intime ami (qui) possède plus que tout le gouvernement (...)". On other occasions the consul calls him "(...) notre frère Ally Aga" or in the year 1731 "(...) Aly Agha, notre douanier, ami

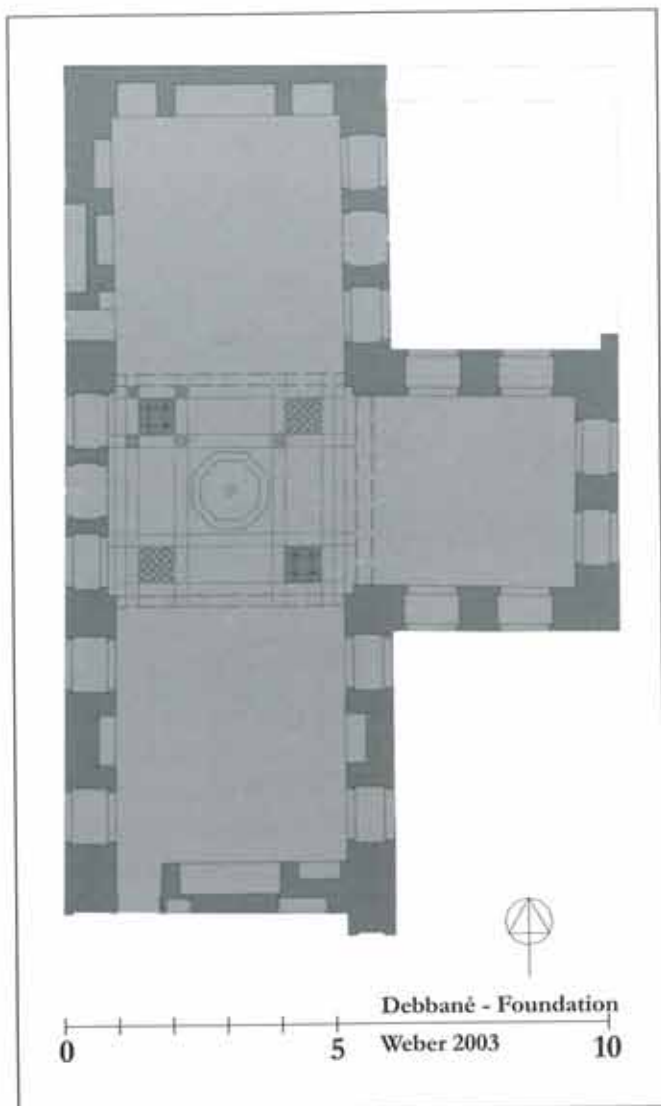


Fig. 5: Qaṣr Debbané, plan of the *qā'a*

sented in Fig. 5 and Fig. 6. These rooms were not meant to contain any furniture except *dīwāns*, boxes (*ṣunduq*), movable tables (*siniyya* with stands), or bowls for coal to heat in the winter (*manqal*). As modernization of domestic space went on, European furniture became very much en vogue and the *'ataba* / *ṭazar* arrangement became an obvi-



Fig. 6: Saida, Bait Debbané, *qā'a*



Fig. 7: Aleppo, reception at a rich merchants house (Russell)

très affectionné de la nation." The French consul asked him quite often to act as a mediator between him and the local authorities. It goes without saying that the French consul was interested in the local Christian community where 'Alī Āghā assisted him several times in settling difficult matters. They were also on business terms with each other as consular documents prove. One can easily imagine how 'Alī Āghā received the consul in his new house and how they were discussing matters together sitting on low *dīwāns* in the *qā'a* (Fig. 7). The *qā'a* of 'Alī Āghā displayed his exclusive taste and his visitors must have been quite impressed by the luxurious decor of his reception hall. The consul – as we know by his records – demanded several times in Paris for money to build himself a more representative home – probably after being received in the *qā'a* of 'Alī Āghā.

As mentioned above 'Alī Āghā was looking for a representative style en vogue in those days. He did not orientate himself towards Istanbul, Iran or Europe, but to the regional center. This new style, the T-shape *qā'a* lay out, originated from Damascus. The newly applied techniques of embellishment for Saida were color paste decoration and wooden lacquer work on the ceilings. The most outstanding new technique that was imported from Damascus to Saida was the color paste decoration. The latter had been developed in Cairo and Damascus during the late 14th century, but became a more or less pure Damascene way of decoration. During the 16th century its technique improved quite impressively and integrated Mamluk geometric patterns and Ottoman floral motives, like the tulip and carnation. It is important to stress that the frequent usage of tulips in the 18th century has nothing in common with the *Lâle Devri* under Ahmed III (1703-1730), but was the continuation of a tulip fashion imported to the province during the second half of the 16th century. The paste itself is made out of colored paste which was inserted into prepared carved motives of stones. After the filling of the paste into the stone it was probably leveled with a spatula, so that its surface appears like a mosaic.

This was the most characteristic technique of a local style, consisting of elements from the architecture of Damas-

cus before the Ottomans on the one hand, and from the single but strong impact of Ottoman architecture during the 16th century on the other hand. It developed quite independently into a local 'bourgeois' style being applied onto the houses of wealthy owners and public buildings. This local Ottoman 'bourgeois style' was very homogeneous and highly standardized during the 18th century. Between 1600 and 1820 one can often find color paste decorations that were made by Damascene workshops on single buildings in different places in Syria and Lebanon. The patterns that one frequently finds in Saida were partly exact copies or parallels of those frequently used patterns in Damascus. On older buildings in Saida or Dayr al-Qamar this style and these techniques were not applied and it is obvious that upper class families in southern Syria and Lebanon during the 17th and 18th centuries turned towards the regional center which was Damascus. This stands in sharp contrast to the developments during the 19th century. However, for evaluating urban culture in the 18th century this is an important consideration. In the age of notables which were orientating themselves on the lines of the local center Damascus, which became the dominant local center throughout the 18th century.

'Alī Āghā was building and decorating in a conscious way and he was obviously proud of it – if we believe what the calligrapher and craftsman chiseled in the most prominent wall of the *qā'a* – on the spot where the Āghā was sitting during receptions overlooking the people passing by in front of the city:

*The castle nightingales have sung in tune with the
fountain's spray*

Showers as plentiful as those sent by heaven.

*The owner's hand is more generous than
rain-heavy clouds.*

*He is a wellspring of gifts, the dining companion
of the noble born.*

*'Alī, the flower of nobility, the paragon of all virtues,
Scion of the illustrious Hammūd family.*

*Higher and higher he rises into the upper realms
of joy and grandeur.*

The future holds bright and glorious days for him.

*Your wishes were fulfilled beyond all expectation
when you built
This magnificent house in its incomparable setting,
beautiful as a
maiden resplendent on her wedding day.
Your perseverance has borne fruit and you have
recorded the date
for posterity. The heavens look down on you kindly
and your
guiding star is at its zenith.*

*With the help of God and with his blessing, this house
was completed
at the beginning of the year 1134*

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Handeln und Wohnen in Osmanischer Zeit

*Das Tripoli-Projekt des Orient-Instituts –
Bericht über die Arbeiten 2003*

Stefan Weber
(Beirut)

Das Deutsche Orient-Institut in Beirut arbeitet zusammen mit dem 'Centre de Restauration et Conservation', dem Bürgermeisteramt von Tripoli und Professoren des Historischen Seminars der Libanesischen Universität Tripoli an einem interdisziplinären Projekt zur Erforschung der Geschichte und Altstadt von Tripoli. Grundlage hierfür ist eine Bearbeitung der wichtigsten historischen Quellen – primär osmanischer Gerichtsakten – und ein digitaler Survey des Baubestandes der Altstadt. Das Projekt steht unter der Schirmherrschaft des libanesischen Ministers für Kultur und wird von der Deutschen Vertretung im Libanon unterstützt. Das Auswärtige Amt finanziert die Restaurierung des mamlukisch-osmanischen Süq Ḥarāğ, einer der wichtigsten historischen Handelsbauten in der Altstadt, und entspricht damit einem gemeinsamen

Antrag des Libanesischen Ministeriums für Kultur (libanesische Antikendirektion) und des Orient-Instituts in Beirut. Diese Restaurierungsmaßnahme ist eingebunden in das Tripoli-Projekt des OIB.

Die gegenwärtigen Studien des libanesischen Council for Development and Reconstruction (Weltbank-Projekt) zur Altstadtsanierung werden durch unsere Arbeiten ergänzt.¹ Die Stadtverwaltung von Tripoli hat dem Projekt dankenswerter Weise ein Büro mit einer Kopie der Gerichtsakten und den bereits vorhandenen Materialien zur Stadtforschung im Qaṣr Nawfal zur Verfügung gestellt. Dieses Büro wurde durch das Auswärtige Amt mit entsprechenden Computern ausgestattet. Im Folgenden soll das Projekt vorgestellt und aus den gegenwärtigen Arbeiten berichtet werden.

Tripoli wurde nach der mamlukischen Eroberung der Kreuzfahrerstaaten um 1294 entlang einer Handelsstraße neu gegründet. Als einzige Neugründung des östlichen Mittelmeerraumes im ausgehenden Mittelalter und der beginnenden Vormoderne musste die städtische Planung nur auf minimale Vorgaben durch ältere Stadtstrukturen Rücksicht nehmen. Aufgrund dessen und durch die relative Stabilität ihrer politischen Systeme (Mamluken, Osmanen) in den folgenden sechs Jahrhunderten bis zum entscheidenden Umbruch im frühen 20. Jahrhundert (Nationalstaat), durch ihren komplexen und gut erhaltenen Baubestand sowie durch eine gute Quellenlage (Gerichtsakten) lassen sich Systeme städtischer Organisation seit den Mamluken hier besonders gut und in ‚Reinform‘ beobachten.

Da die Gerichtsakten und die meisten Wohn- und Handelsbauten der Stadt aus osmanischer Zeit stammen, liegt der Schwerpunkt dieser Untersuchung auf dem Zeitraum der Osmanischen Herrschaft (1516-1918), die auf den Vorgaben mamlukischer Zeit (1289-1516) aufbaut und sie weiterentwickelt. Dabei sollen nicht primär die Charakteristika einer einzelnen Epoche (Zeitalter der Notabeln oder der *Tanzīmāt*) herausgearbeitet, sondern über einen längeren Zeitraum hinweg Systeme und Träger sowie Muster städtischer Organisation, ihre Kontinuitäten und Brüche, beobachtet und beschrieben werden. Uns interessieren