

Investigation and Preservation of the Palmyrian Historical and Cultural Heritage by Russian and European Researchers in the 17th–21st Centuries

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The article accents to a comprehensive study of the contribution by the Russian and foreign scholars in the preservation and study of the Palmyrene archaeological sites. The paper aims to systematize and synthesize the achievements of various scientific and archaeological schools, field researchers, and philosophical thinkers collecting and analyzing data on the ancient city of Palmyra. One provides the main milestones for the research of the historic and cultural complex through the structural-functional and descriptive-compared methods. It identifies four major successive stages, but at the same time completely not interchangeable between theological and purely scientific-analytic paradigms. In this regard, one provides brief information about the History of Palmyra and the study of the city. It compares the results of various European expeditions and four Russian expeditions (1882, 1900, 2016, and 2019), while offering opportunities for further cooperation in the region. In the context of the research, the paper attempts to give a precise and holistic justification of the motivation for Palmyra by representatives of various intellectual traditions. One covers the development of humanitarian scientific thinking over the past 300 years. It provides the primary intraregional context for several historical events that have impacted both the preservation and destruction of these monuments. The current restoration of Palmyra goes far beyond Russian-Syrian humanitarian relations, as the development of digital technologies has enabled a large-scale work in the last five years. The experience gained will enable me to develop an appropriate strategy for restoring World Cultural Heritage sites.

Keywords: Syria, Russia, Palmyra, historical and cultural heritage, archeology, science diplomacy.

Introduction

In recent years, Russia and Syria have built up cooperation in many areas: political, economic, military, and humanitarian. When it comes to the latter, we can mention the fact that Western journalism, which focuses on Arabic-speaking readers among other things, states an opinion that Russian humanitarian projects are only an excuse to ensure the implementation of geopolitical objectives pursued by both countries in the region, while historical and cultural issues do not represent any value for Russia [1]. In this regard, it seems important to shed light on the symbolic significance of the study of Palmyra by representatives of the Russian intelligence community in historical retrospect, to emphasize the multidimensional development of Russian-Syrian relations and to determine the

role of domestic science diplomacy in building up humanitarian cooperation between the Russian Federation and the Syrian Arab Republic.

In the Arabic-speaking, primarily Syrian, scientific historiographical tradition, the main emphasis is placed on the study of Palmyra by Western European, primarily French and British, researchers and travelers [2]. The Russian contribution, however, is described by briefly mentioning the results of the expedition of 1881–1882 undertaken by Semyon Abamelek-Lazarev (1857–1916): the description of the circumstances of locating and further transferring the Palmyra Customs Tariff to the Russian Archaeological Institute in Constantinople (1895–1914) by the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1842–1918) [3].

Pre-war Syrian publications of the Baathist period were directly connected with the results of the ongoing archaeological excavations and restoration works conducted in collaboration with foreign expeditions [4, p. 298]. The results of the joint work of the archaeological missions of the Russian Federation and the Syrian Arab Republic to restore and preserve the historical and cultural heritage of this ancient city are represented on the official websites of the General Directorate for Antiquities and Museums of the Syrian Arab Republic and the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA). Such reports on the current state of affairs contain only brief information about holding joint conferences and exhibitions [5].

The research methodology is based on structural-functional and descriptive-comparative approaches. It aims to provide a comprehensive description of the contribution made by Western European and Russian scholars, travelers, and researchers, as well as the changing interest in the study of Palmyra at the structural level. With that in mind, we can identify four main alternating steps, which, however, are not fully interchangeable:

1. Collecting information about the architecture and history of Palmyra and its interpretation, based on the synthesis of theological and early scientific approaches (16th — first half of the 18th century).
2. Conducting the first field cartographic works, preparing illustrated almanacs, and increasingly rationalizing the obtained empirical data — a gradual transition from Christian to scientific orientalism (second half of the 18th — mid-19th century).
3. The works of complex field expeditions and archaeological excavations on the site, the study of Palmyra from a strictly scientific perspective (last quarter of the 19th — first decade of the 21st century).
4. Conducting works to save and preserve the historical and cultural heritage of Palmyra, preparing the evaluative research into the restoration and reconstruction of the destroyed architectural monuments of this complex (second half of the 2010s to the present).

Thus, before proceeding to a detailed answer to the question, it is necessary to provide brief information about the history of Palmyra and the study of this city by Western European researchers of an earlier period.

This paper emphasizes the analysis of various activities pursued by our compatriots within the framework of the study of the archaeological sites of Palmyra. Since complex archaeological expeditions to Palmyra were not carried out during the Soviet period, the paper talks about pre-revolutionary and modern Russian expeditions. Of all the Middle Eastern expeditions of the Institute of Archaeology of the USSR Academy of Sciences, we can cite only the Mesopotamian expedition (1977) in Northern Iraq, which in 1988 continued to carry out excavations on the Iraqi-Syrian border of the Al-Hasaka governorate [6, pp. 10–12]; and the Soviet-Yemeni Complex Expedition (1982) [7, p. 179].

Evolution of approaches to studying Palmyra: from the Middle Ages to the first half of the 18th century

The history of Palmyra dates back centuries: economic activities date back to the Neolithic period. Palmyra is first mentioned in the cuneiform archive of the Sumero-Akkadian city of Mari, which existed in the 3rd–2nd millennia BC [8]. Regarding the etymology of the name of the city, various schools of thought have not come to a consensus: some of them see a connection with both Sumerian and early Semitic languages and dialects. The name of this city came to the Russian language indirectly through Western European languages, which borrowed the word from Latin, which in turn borrowed it from the Greek Παλμύρα, which calqued *Tadmor* into *Palmyra*, which led to the spread of a false etymology — *the city of palms* [9, pp. 436–440], terminologically linking it with the word present in Arabic, Aramaic, and Hebrew: tamer/tamrē/tāmār تمر/ܛܡܪ/תמר, that is, a collective noun which means *dry dates* [8]. This theory has a downside: the Ethiopian group of Semitic languages, in particular, ተምር *tam* in Gèez was directly borrowed from Arabic [10, p. 576]. In Arabic itself, it could have originally come from تمار *tamar*, denoting any *fruit*; in its turn, the letter representing the voiceless dental fricative *t* was absent both in the original Phoenician and Palmyro-Aramaic alphabet [11, pp. 846–848].

As for the autochthonous Semitic, Palmyra-Aramaic *Tat-alaf-dalath-mem-waw-resh* ܛܛܠܦܕܠܛܡܘܘܪܫ, the vocalism for representing vowel sounds is insufficiently studied due to a lack of vocalizations: the consonant ܘ/*waw*/ historically could denote both the sound *o* and *y*. There are several theories explaining the origin, the most common of them being either correspondences with Aramaic roots: ܕܡܪܝܢ D-M-R — to be amazed; therefore, ܛܝܡܘܪܬܐ *Teḏmurta* — *an object of astonishment, wonder* [9, p. 448] which can be challenged chronologically; or borrowing from the Hurrian language. An attempt to explain the etymology of the name of the city through the Arabic root D-M-R — *to destroy* is also erroneous since it does not correspond to the word-formation model denoting a place of action and the masdars of the Arabic language [8].

In ancient times, the city, located on the border with the Syrian desert, grew due to the caravan trade with the East, in particular with the Parthian Empire. Although the population of Palmyra was predominantly Semitic, its architecture and culture were significantly influenced by the Greco-Roman and Persian civilizations. Palmyra was destroyed by Emperor Aurelian during the suppression of the uprising of Queen Zenobia in 273, subsequently, the city was repeatedly attacked by nomads and rebuilt by Emperors Diocletian and Justinian in 303 and 527, respectively. By the beginning of the Arab conquests, the majority of the city's population were Christians; they avoided another destruction by concluding a treaty (*dimma*) with Khalid ibn Walid in 636, who was heading with his army through the Syrian desert to Yarmouk. The trade ensured the city's prosperity, however, with the weakening of the Abbasid caliphate, it passed from one Muslim ruler to another until it became part of the Ottoman Empire. This affected the condition of local sandstone buildings, which were gradually destroyed [4, pp. 298–300]. Moreover, over the centuries the city suffered from several earthquakes [12, p. 35]

It is known for a fact that Palmyra was visited by the medieval Judeo-Iberian traveler Benjamin Ben Jonah (1130–1173), a rabbi from the Navarrese city of Tudela, on his way from Palestine to Mosul. He noted the presence of a large Palmyra Jewish community of about two thousand people. In his turn, the local historian and geographer Abu'l-Fida



Fig. 1. Colonnade of the Temple of Bel by Louis-François Cassas (1799). Available at: https://www.getty.edu/research/exhibitions_events/exhibitions/palmyra/exhibition.html (accessed: 21.02.2023)

(1273–1331) described Palmyra at the beginning of the 14th century as a *place full of wonderful ruins* (fig. 1). Until the end of the 16th century, information about Palmyra reached Western Europe mainly due to the stories of Muslim merchants [12, p. 36].

At the beginning of the 17th century, the Portuguese Jesuit and cartographer Manuel Godinho de Heredia (1563–1623), while traveling east, was at a fairly close distance from Palmyra, subsequently, mentioned on the pages of the *Treatise on Ophir* (1616) a giant structure “similar to the temple of Solomon”, referring most likely to the Temple of Bel [13, pp. 23–24]. It was the search for prototypes of the biblical Land of Ophir that engrossed the minds of Western European, in particular Masonic, philosophers, who began to identify it with the described ruins using the fragmentary data. This, in turn, laid the foundations of Christian Orientalism in the classical understanding of this term [13, pp. 5–9].

In the first half of the 17th century, Palmyra was visited by many travelers including Pietro della Valle (1586–1652) between 1616 and 1625 and Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1605–1689) in 1638: these were private trips for trade and diplomatic purposes. Nevertheless, we can also note the first scientific research: in 1616, the German philologist Jan Gruter published the Palmyrene alphabet, which, however, he could not decipher. In the Modern age, in 1691, within the framework of a centralized expedition, Palmyra was visited by English merchants of the Levantine Trading Company (1592–1825), led by the Anglican chaplain William Halifax and the Dutch illustrator Gerard Hofstede van Essen, who captured the first panoramic picture of the ruins of the ancient city. Their visit produced a description of Palmyra in line with the natural theology, which prevailed in those years. It was presented to the Royal Society of London for the Improving of Natural Knowledge — one of the oldest national scientific societies in Western Europe. The travelers mistook the material of the buildings for marble, although, in reality, it was a local shell rock; such an idea persisted for a long time [14, pp. 6–11].

It is worth mentioning the possible and most probable reason for the visit of representatives of the Levantine Palmyra Company, apart from the ethnographic interest: the defeat of the Ottoman army near Vienna in 1683 temporarily destabilized the situation on the southeastern borders of the empire. As a result, some clans of the Kakhtanid tribe of Shammar migrated from Nejd to the north towards Upper Mesopotamia in the Mosul area, ruining the nomad camps of the Adnanid The al-Mawali tribe, located in the Palmyra oasis, who lived on the territory of the western bank of the Euphrates since the

time of the Abbasid Caliphate [15, pp. 177–180]. This relocation caused the devastation of Palmyra and the temporary suspension of the caravan trade from Baghdad to Damascus; therefore, the main goal of the British could be more pragmatic — inspection of the trade route restored by the early 1690s.

In this context, we can conclude that Hofstede's illustrations most likely demonstrate the ruined state of the city after the above-mentioned inter-tribal conflict. Nevertheless, this interpretation contravenes the fact that the British had already prepared an expedition to Palmyra before in 1678, the Anglican chaplain of Aleppo (1670–1681), Robert Huntington, attempted to reach the city. However, the hostile actions of the local emir forced him to return midway [16, p. 13].

Subsequently, until the middle of the 18th century, the obtained data became the primary source of theological interpretations of a whole constellation of English and German authors of various Protestant denominations, precursors of historical and archaeological empiricism; the first of them being the monograph *Antiquities of Palmyra* (1696) by Abednego Seller (1645–1706) — an unprofessional theologian and collector of values. This work was widely criticized by contemporaries both for its unorthodox approach and for copying the ideas of their more famous Anglican authors [13, p. 14].

William Halifax's merit, apart from the detailed travel logs, was an unsuccessful attempt to decipher the Palmyra inscriptions, noting that “this [unknown] symbol being added almost under every Greek inscription we saw, and rarely found alone, I am apt to believe it the Native language and the Character [of the place], the Matter of it contains, nothing else but what we have in Greek”. This statement, later, became an important clue for researchers of the Palmyra alphabet in the middle of the 18th century [14, pp. 10–11].

As mentioned above, these were attempts to rationalize the text of the Old Testament and the biblical chronology, to give an accurate geographical reference to the events and personalities mentioned in it. These were various ecclesiological works, noting the correspondence between astronomical constellations, forms, and symbols of the structures, considering them, if not the prototype of the First Temple of Solomon, then at least to be built in his image and likeness. Often the engravings of the Jerusalem temple of that period were inspired by the images of Palmyra structures — namely the Temples of Bel and Baalshemin, which were the spitting image, according to Isaac Newton (1642–1727), who attributed the construction of Palmyra to 1015 BC, which also refers to the biblical chronology and the Old Testament legend which has it that the city was founded by King Solomon. Newton confirmed this theory by the fact that the proportions of the Palmyra temples are a replica of the description of the First Temple of Yahweh given in chapters 40 to 43 of the Book of Ezekiel [13, pp. 17–34].

Evolution of approaches to studying Palmyra: from the first half of the 18th to the middle of the 19th century

The approach to the study of Palmyra within the framework of the reconstruction of Old Testament architecture in the second half of the 18th century reflected the transition from the complete allegory of natural theology to natural philosophy, mainly in the Masonic community. In this case, we are talking about the comprehensive formation of such a discipline as the theory of the history of architecture, pioneered by Isaac Newton's close friend and biographer William Stukeley (1687–1765) and the Palladian architect

John Wood Sr (1704–1754), who conducted the first field studies of Stonehenge, which in turn significantly influenced their interpretation of archetypal semantics and semiotics religious buildings. Like Carl Linnaeus, they raised the issue of the genealogical ordering of architectural styles, still, they offered romanticized, rather than strictly scientific concepts and categories [16, pp. 20–26].

An explanation of this historical context within the Western European intellectual tradition is necessary for an accurate understanding of the ideas that guided the travelers before going to Palmyra. An example of such a trip was a two-week visit to the city by English archaeologists James Dawkins (1722–1757) and Robert Wood (1716–1775) together with the Italian architect and engraver Giovanni Battista Borra (1713–1771) as members of a private expedition to the Eastern Mediterranean, who subsequently published in 1753 a vividly illustrated account of their journey — the *Ruins of Palmyra, otherwise Tedmore in the Desert*. It included a complete city plan, drawings, and illustrations of the main architectural monuments, in particular the Triumphal Arc, general views of the complex, and several accompanying essays-comments. The publication of this monumental work was favorably received not only in England but also throughout Western Europe, which had a significant impact on the formation of neoclassicism in the art and architecture of the second half of the 18th century. Moreover, a year after the publication of Dawkins and Wood's work, archaeologists and linguists Jean-Jacques Barthelemy (1716–1795) and John Swinton (1703–1777) independently of each other were able to decipher the Palmyra alphabet, using the illustrations of relief inscriptions, thereby making an invaluable contribution to the development of Semitology [17, pp. 318–323].

The next work of a similar scale was a three-volume edition of *Picturesque travels in Syria, Phoenicia, Palestine, and Lower Egypt* published in 1799 by the architect and landscape painter Louis-Francois Cassas (1756–1826), which included about a hundred images of temples, civil buildings and cemeteries of Palmyra (fig. 2). He visited this city as part of his Levantine journey (1785–1787) commissioned by the French ambassador (1784–1792) at the Ottoman court Auguste de Choiseul-Goufier (1752–1817), who himself was a connoisseur of ancient architecture [17, pp. 324–326].

The first Russian archaeological expeditions were organized during this period. They aimed to study Palmyra, which had been under the close attention of Western European researchers since the second half of the 18th century. As mentioned above, Palmyra engravings influenced the development of neoclassicism as a new architectural style, different from the previous Baroque and Rococo styles. For instance, during the construction of the General Staff Building in St. Petersburg, Karl Rossi (1775–1849) drew inspiration from these engravings [18]. The elements of Palmyra architecture were fully reflected in the monuments of Catherine's classicism. In particular, the formation of this architectural tradition was described by the modern architect and graphic artist Maxim Atayants, one of the leading Russian specialists involved in the preparation of projects on the digital modeling of the damaged and lost historical and cultural heritage of Palmyra [19, pp. 128–130], such as the Temple of Bel and the Triumphal Arch (fig. 3).

We should also note other elements of the Russian-Palmyra parallelism during the Enlightened Absolutism of Catherine II (1729–1796). A similar manifestation is the personification of the latter with the Palmyra Queen Zenobia (240–275), numerous references to which can be traced throughout the 18th–19th centuries in the works of European sculptors, artists, poets, playwrights, and writers. Moreover, after the publication of



Fig. 2. The Map of Palmyra by Louis-François Cassas (1799). Available at: https://www.getty.edu/research/exhibitions_events/exhibitions/palmyra/exhibition.html (accessed: 21.02.2023)

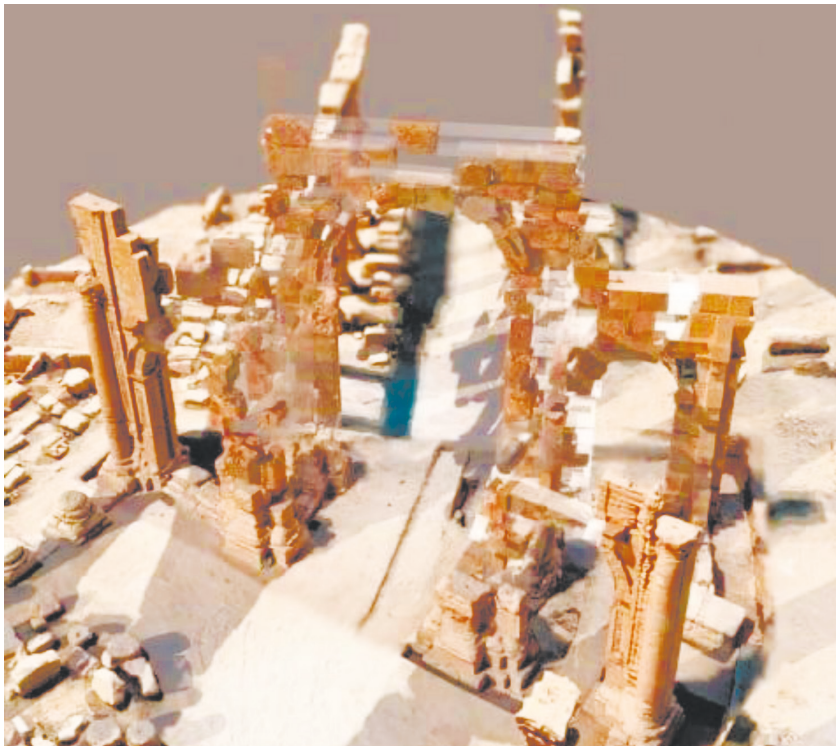


Fig. 3. Digital model of Monumental Arch of Palmyra [7, p. 78]

Dawkins and Wood's almanac by several French panegyrists, the epithet *Northern Palmyra* began to be used concerning St. Petersburg, subsequently, this artistic image was firmly entrenched in aesthetic discourse, due to Russian writers and composers of the 19th century [20, pp. 167–170].

The evolution of approaches to studying Palmyra: from the middle of the 19th to the first decade of the 21st century

During the first half of the 19th century, when orientalism came into fashion, Palmyra increasingly attracts the attention of travelers, illustrators, and collectors of valuables. In 1864, the city and its surroundings were first captured in photographs by the French naval officer Louis Vigne (1831–1896), which was commissioned by the historian and antiquarian Honoré Theodorique d'Albert, Duke of Luigne (1802–1867) [21, pp. 23–25].

With the advancement of humanitarian knowledge and empirical studies of classical archaeology based on the field studies of the monuments of the Mediterranean basin, both the approach and the understanding of the significance of Palmyra in world history changed. Conducting the first comprehensive excavations on the territory of the city became a matter of time.

The history of the development of humanitarian ties between Russia and Syria

Returning to the main research issue, we note that the humanitarian ties between Russia and Syria are much deeper than they may seem at first glance. The pilgrimage of Russian monks to Palestine and their visits to the cities on the territory of modern Syria was first mentioned in the 11th century. There are also numerous examples of the support provided to Syrian Orthodox communities by Russian tsars, who allocated funds for the restoration of asylums for the poor and churches. Moreover, in the middle of the 17th century, Patriarch Macarius III of Antioch visited Moscow. At this point, it is worth mentioning the fact of his meeting in Kolomna with the governor, the son of a Syrian Arab [22, pp. 137–141]. For a long time, the main contacts were maintained through church channels, which reached a peak by 1880–1900: the Imperial Orthodox Palestinian Society founded a large number of schools and pilgrimage infrastructure on the territory of modern Syria.

The first documented case of a visit to Palmyra by Russian travelers in 1872 was an orientalist travel note by Princess Lydia Pashkova (1845 — after 1917) in the French magazine *Tour du Mond* as of 1877, who wrote, among other things, significant journalistic materials describing her travels in the Middle East. However, the first Russian expedition to the territory of modern Syria, in particular, to Palmyra, was made by Prince S. S. Abamelek-Lazarev. In March of 1882, during a two-week stay in the Palmyra-El-Karyatein area, he accidentally discovered a bilingual Greek-Aramaic stele containing information about the regime of customs duties [12, pp. 38–45].

This unique monument has been kept in the Hermitage since 1904 and was subsequently studied by the historian-antiquarian Mikhail Rostovtsev (1870–1952), as well as orientalists Pavel Kokovtsov (1861–1942) and Ilya Shifman (1930–1990), whose works had a great influence on the development of Aramaic philology [23, pp. 6–10].

The Palmyra expedition of the Russian Archaeological Institute in April — May 1900 provided antiquarian scientists with materials on written monuments; however, it did not aim to conduct complex archaeological works [24, pp. 271–273]. At the same time, Palmyra is visited by a small American expedition. It should be noted that the institute was opened in Constantinople in 1895, and the preparation of the future expedition became the main task of its first and last director (1895–1914) Fyodor Uspensky (1845–1928). The Russian mission resulted in the formation of the Hermitage's Fund of Palmyra Tombstones. Boris Farmakovskiy (1870–1928) notes the unique style of Palmyra necropolises, which combined elements of both Greek and Syro-Aramaic architecture, which is expressed in the synthesis of both traditions in the painting of the burial chambers of Megaret-Abu-Shail, containing cross mythological plots [25, pp. 173–176]. It was also mentioned that there was an influence of the Palmyra style on the Hellenistic architectural tradition of both the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea region.

The use of these descriptive materials in the restoration of the destroyed heritage of Palmyra is extremely difficult due to the insufficient number of photographic materials and schemes; the above remarks concerning the eclectic nature of local architecture allow us to study in detail the issue of restoration of such elements as pilasters, capitals and bas-reliefs [18].

The first comprehensive studies of Palmyra

Nevertheless, the primacy in conducting archaeological excavations in Palmyra belongs to the German archaeologist Otto Puchstein (1856–1911), who was a member of an extensive expedition of the German Archaeological Institute in Palmyra and Baalbek (1902–1905). In 1917, his work was continued by another equally famous German archaeologist Theodor Wiegand (1864–1936), who was a captain from the artillery of the Asian Corps of the Reichsheer. He was in charge of the German-Turkish Command for the Protection of Monuments of Syria and Palestine, founded by Ahmed Jemal Pasha (1872–1922), commander-in-chief of the 4th Turkish Army in 1916, which allowed to save local architectural masterpieces from destruction during the active phase of the Syrian Campaign during the Middle East Theatre of World War I. Moreover, Wiegand was the first to use aerial photographs for documentation. The photographs were obtained with the help of reconnaissance airplanes at the disposal of the Asian Corps [26, pp. 42–48].

We can explain the interest of German researchers in the study of Palmyra by the spread of the ideas of *pan-Babylonism* in the framework of rethinking biblical archaeology and chronology [27].

With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the territory of Palmyra became part of the French mandate in Syria and Lebanon. During this period, the mandate authorities began extensive activities to study and protect the historical and cultural heritage of the region they were in charge of. In particular, they established an entity that served as the basis for the Main Directorate for Antiquities and Museums, founded in 1950. The work on the systematization of archaeological excavations in Palmyra began in 1924; from 1929 to 1940, the excavations were led by the Director of the Institute of Archaeology of Beirut, Henri Arnold Seyrig (1895–1973). Some artifacts were transferred to the Louvre, while a significant number of them formed the collection of the Palmyra Archaeological Museum. In addition, French researchers continued to translate and comment on Palmyra

inscriptions and epigraphy. It is worth noting that historical Palmyra was inhabited until 1932, when the mandate authorities implemented a program to relocate residents, preserving the ruins of the ancient city [28].

From 1930 to 1945, there was a restoration of the Temple of Bel to restore its antique appearance. Posterior residential buildings, individual elements of the superstructures of the Christian church, rebuilt into a mosque, were destroyed. Some of the most significant discoveries of the 1930s are several bilingual Greek-Aramaic votive inscriptions that were discovered on the non-extant statues dating back to the 1st century BC — 1st century AD, dedicated to the triad of gods — Bel, Yarhibol, and Aglibol. The discovery made it possible to conclude that at that time Bel was assigned the role of the supreme deity of the Palmyra pantheon, and the other two, his companions, were regarded as the gods of the Sun and Moon [29, pp. 10–18].

After the end of the Second World War and the full independence of the Syrian Republic, further excavations were temporarily suspended. After the political situation in the country somewhat stabilized, a Swiss expedition was organized in 1954, under the auspices of UNESCO, which carried out archaeological works until 2011. The French mission also continued its work, which was later joined by the American and German (FRG) missions. In particular, in the 1970s and 1980s, Andreas Schmidt-Kolinet, one of the world's leading modern specialists in the Middle Eastern art of the Greco-Roman period, worked in Palmyra [30, pp. 300–320]. Subsequently, in 1980 UNESCO declares the ruins of Palmyra, the necropolises adjacent to it, and the Old City of Bosra a World Heritage Site. It should be noted that a total of 6 objects in Syria have a similar status and 12 more are among the candidates [31].

After the Arab Socialist Renaissance Party came to power, the General Directorate for Antiquities and Museums of the Syrian Arab Republic, since 1959, began working together with a Polish archaeological expedition led by Kazimierz Michalowski (1901–1981), an outstanding Egyptologist and researcher of the Eastern Mediterranean region. This period saw an exploration of the region in the western part of the complex, as well as parts of the necropolises. In 1973, Michalowski's work was continued by another well-known Polish archaeologist, Michal Galikovsky, who worked for almost 40 years to study and preserve the historical and cultural heritage of Palmyra. It was he who discovered the Temple of Athena-Al-Lat, as well as her marble statue [30].

Progress in the study of Palmyra during the second half of the 20th century would have been impossible without Khalid al-Asaad (2015–1934) (خالد الأسعد), Director of the Department of Antiquities and Museums of Palmyra of the General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums (1963–2003), a long-term leader and participant of numerous archaeological excavations and restoration missions operating in Palmyra [32]. In the 1960s, he discovered many cemeteries of the Hellenistic and Byzantine periods; he also carried out works to restore the columns of the Temples of Baalshimin and Al-Lat, the Roman Theater, the walls of the city, the castle of Fakhr ad-Din, as well as some other historical sites in the Homs governorate. His scientific heritage includes more than 20 monographs on the archaeological sites and manuscripts of this region, in Arabic and French [20]. According to al-Asaad's relatives, in recent years he continued to work on the research into the genealogy and dialect of Palmyra residents, but most of his drafts, including those on the electronic media, were lost along with his archive [33].

The end of the 1980s saw excavations in the city center, where several residential quarters were examined; moreover, the discovery of church foundations helped to establish that the city had been predominantly Christian until the beginning of the tenth century [30]. From 1988 to 2010, a Syrian expedition of the Institute of Archaeology of the USSR Academy of Sciences worked in the northeast of the Syrian Arab Republic. It was led by an outstanding Soviet archaeologist and specialist in the history of the Caucasus and Northern Mesopotamia, Rauf Munchaev (1928–2021). The expedition was a continuation of the Mesopotamian expedition to Kul-Teppe, Tel Sotto, and Tel-Magzaliya. The main works were concentrated exclusively in the valley of the Khabur River in Tel Hazna I and II, the oldest religious and administrative complex of modern Syria, dating back to the first third of the 4th millennium BC [6, pp. 19–26]; the implementation of any activities on the territory of the Palmyra complex was not included in the objectives of this expedition. At the same time, we should note the existing links between Palmyra and Urartu in ancient times. In particular, Boris Piotrovsky (1908–1992) touched on this issue in his works.

In 2001, a Japanese expedition joined the study of the Palmyra necropolises [4, p. 301]. Before the complete suspension of all fieldwork in 2011, one of the important discoveries regarding Palmyra's food supply was made by the Norwegian archaeologist Jorgen Christian Meyer, who studied the irrigation system of the city [34, pp. 180–182].

Evolution of approaches to studying Palmyra: from the first decade of the 21st century to the present time

During the acute phase of the struggle against the supporters of the quasi-caliphate in Syria, terrorists destroyed and looted many ancient monuments throughout the country. The most significant damage was done to Palmyra, which was under the control of radicals from May 21, 2015, to March 27, 2016, and from December 8, 2016, to March 2, 2017. Apart from the Triumphal Arch, Tetracylon, and the Temples of Bel and Baalshamin, unique underground and tower tombs, as well as the fortress of the Druze Emir Fakhr ad-Din II were also damaged [33]. Even though most of the exhibits were taken from Palmyra to Damascus on May 21, 2015, literally hours before ISIS* entered the city, the collection of the Archaeological Museum was looted and destroyed. In particular, one of the main sculptures, the Lion of the goddess Al-Lat, dating back to the I century BC, was split into pieces. The sculpture had been discovered by a Polish archaeological expedition and, subsequently, reconstructed by the sculptor Jozef Gazy (1910–1998) in 1977. Moreover, during the first occupation of Palmyra by terrorists, the patriarch of Syrian Palmyra studies, Khalid Asaad, was executed [30].

Although, at first glance, the geographical position of Palmyra does not have any value in terms of conducting military operations, we must mention a really important strategic nature of this territory, namely the presence of large phosphate deposits. Phosphates are valuable minerals necessary for the needs of agriculture and industry. Moreover, they are some of the most suitable natural components for the production of weapons-grade uranium. Before the outbreak of the Civil War, Syria was one of the top five phosphate-exporting countries in the world. Its largest phosphate mines are located in the province of

* A terrorist organization banned in the Russian Federation.



Fig. 4. Current state of Monumental Arch of Palmyra (spring 2022) [7, p. 24]

Homs near Palmyra: Al-Sharqiya and Khneifis [35, pp. 773–774]. It was for this area in 2015–2017 that some of the fiercest battles were fought against ISIS*.

Restorers and archaeologists of the State Hermitage Museum, the Institute of the History of Material Culture of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Russian Geographical Society, as well as other Russian museums and architectural bureaus, were involved in carrying out the evaluation work necessary for the design of further restoration of destroyed objects [33]. The preparation of the action plan required regular expeditions and cooperation with colleagues from UNESCO and countries traditionally engaged in Palmyra research: France, Germany, Switzerland, Poland, Japan, and the USA. However, for many reasons, including political ones, such cooperation has not been fully established. Nevertheless, since 2016, some of the best Polish restorers Bartosz Markowski and Robert Zhukovsky have been working in Palmyra, restoring the collection of sculptures of the Palmyra Archaeological Museum [30].

In 2016, an expedition of Russian experts worked on the preparation of a project for the reconstruction of the historical and cultural monuments of Palmyra. It was decided to conduct aerial photography to create a 3D model of the complex and conduct a preliminary damage evaluation, which was carried out the same year in collaboration with military topographers [24, pp. 273–274]. As a result, it was found that the most preserved structures from ancient times were significantly destroyed [36] (fig. 4).

Another aerial photography was done after the complete liberation of Palmyra, during the second expedition in 2019. During the fieldwork, it was found that 40% of the

* A terrorist organization banned in the Russian Federation.

structures of the Triumphal Arch were best preserved, 16% were destroyed, and the rest of the structure collapsed, but can be used during restoration [36]. Another monument that can potentially be restored shortly is the Zenobia Column, which split into its parts during the explosion [24, p. 275]. In October of the same year, an agreement was signed between the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Sevastopol State University, and the General Directorate for Antiquities and Museums of the Syrian Arab Republic. The agreement envisaged the establishment of a joint Russian-Syrian underwater archaeological mission in the waters of Tartus province. As soon as in December, the first studies in the past 30 years were conducted in this area. The research was carried out from December 2020 to January 2021. Moreover, Russian specialists began to carry out research work to study archaeological sites in the Aleppo area [37].

It is worth noting the leading role of Mikhail Piotrovsky, Director of the Hermitage and Dean of the Faculty of Asian and African Studies at St. Petersburg University, who is one of the main researchers of the ancient culture of Syria. He was engaged in organizing several cross-exhibitions, and conferences in St. Petersburg and Damascus [5]. Due to his active mediation, the November of 2019 saw the signing of cooperation agreements between the State Hermitage Museum, the Institute of History of Material Culture of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and the General Directorate for Antiquities and Museums of the Syrian Arab Republic, which outlined the restoration of the historical and cultural heritage of Syria [24, pp. 275–277].

In the autumn of 2021, the negotiations between UNESCO and Syrian colleagues resulted in a decision to restore the Triumphal Arc. March 2022 witnessed the signing of a memorandum of understanding [36]. Last year, on November 11, St. Petersburg hosted a new conference dedicated to the technical aspect of the restoration of this monument. Furthermore, in the summer of 2022, Mikhail Piotrovsky reported that a new expedition to Palmyra would be undertaken by the Institute of History of Material Culture of the Russian Academy of Sciences in the autumn of the same year [38]. However, for many reasons, it was postponed until 2023. The restoration works of the Triumphal Arc are expected to begin during this expedition (fig. 5).

In May 21–26, 2023, a joint group consisting of restorers, architects, civil engineers, historians and archaeologists from St. Petersburg was in the Syrian Arab Republic to get acquainted with the work done to prepare the Arch of Triumph in Palmyra for restoration. Within the framework of the visit, a presentation of the Palmyra layout made by colleagues from Sevastopol University was made and reports were read at the al-Baroudi Memorial Center (مركز فخري البارودي) in Damascus. Both the reports and the pleasant gift aroused interest and positive responses from the scientific and student community of Damascus. Then, on May 24, a trip in frame of workshop was made to Palmyra, where details of the restoration project proposed by Russian specialists, among whom were M. B. Atayants and N. I. Yavein, were discussed on the spot. Participants and representatives of the international expert community from France, Italy and Poland once again inspected the ancient city and personally saw the huge scale of destruction caused to the city by ISIS* supporters.

The next two days were spent in hearings of reports and discussions in Damascus. They ended with the approval of the restoration project. The next step will be the trans-

* A terrorist organization banned in the Russian Federation.



Fig. 5. Monumental Arch of Palmyra after a year (spring of 2023). Photo by I. V. Gerasimov

fer of all documents on the Arc de Triomphe to the relevant UNESCO structures for final approval. The coordinator and inspirer of this historical project was N. F. Solovyova, who heads the Center for Rescue Archaeology of the Institute of Material Culture of the Russian Academy of Sciences. This event marks a new stage in the study and rescue of Palmyra. On the one hand, it will be new excavations on the territory of the city, on the other — the restoration and revival of the symbol of Syria and friendship between Syria and Russia (fig. 6).

The pivotal regulatory act in the field of cultural and scientific cooperation is the Intergovernmental Agreement between the Syrian Arab Republic and the Russian Federation, which concluded in Damascus on March 30, 1995 [39]. It replaced and expanded a similar agreement concluded between the USSR and the Syrian Arab Republic in 1980 [40]. In particular, it justifies the competence of Russian specialists in the preservation and study of Syrian archaeological sites, according to articles 1 to 3 of this act.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the restoration of Palmyra's unique historical and cultural complex goes far beyond the framework of Russian-Syrian humanitarian relations. Large-scale work has been done in recent years, due to, among other things, the development of digital technologies. The experience gained will make it possible to develop an appropriate strategy for the restoration of world cultural heritage sites. Speaking about the participation of modern Russia in the life of the Middle East region, we somehow touch upon the aspect of science diplomacy.

It is worth noting that the materials of Western journalism are often biased regarding the role of Russian humanitarian projects, in particular, in Syria. Nevertheless, having



Fig. 6. Lapidarium. The initial stage of preparation for restoration. May 2023, Palmyra.
Photo by I. V. Gerasimov

conducted framing and an in-depth analysis of such sources, we conclude that some of our colleagues, performing only a random selection of publications of this kind, unwittingly begin to ignore the principle of scientific neutrality in their works concerning such a multifaceted and subtle issue as the study of the archaeological complex of Palmyra, reducing it exclusively to the topic of Russia's confrontation with the "collective West" [20, p. 174]. Unfortunately, we can state the fact that some foreign actors have created artificial obstacles for Russian researchers, but the salvation of the universal cultural heritage always outweighs the political aspect.

The history of the study of Palmyra is described in numerous volumes of scientific publications, in particular, on the issues of local epigraphy and numismatics. We, on the other hand, summarized the main trends that influenced the formation of scientific interest in the study of Palmyra. Furthermore, we traced the evolution of humanitarian thought by introducing appropriate periodization. Although Russian pre-revolutionary researchers join fieldwork relatively late, this fact does not discount the value of their discoveries.

In the first half of the Soviet period, it is impossible to talk about any decline in interest in Palmyra for objective reasons, such as the ideological justification for refusing to cooperate in the humanitarian sphere with representatives of capitalist countries, the Civil War, and Second World War, the need to conduct archaeological and ethnographic research directly on the territory of the USSR: in particular, in the Trans-Caucasian region in the context of excavations of Urartu, requiring the involvement of a large number of various specialists. With the establishment of the socialist-oriented Baathist regime, the priority of Soviet–Syrian relations in the 1960s–1970s was given to the increase in the defense capability of the Syrian Arab Republic, the implementation of hydraulic engineering projects, geological exploration of the area, and training of technical personnel.

The situation was directly influenced by the adjustment of the foreign policy of the Soviet leadership.

As for the low awareness of foreign audiences about the contribution of Russian specialists, the reason lies, obviously, in the insufficient distribution of these works in foreign languages. In particular, we record an increased number of mentions of Russian pre-revolutionary studies in the English- and Arabic-speaking academic community after 2014, due to the joint publication of Oxford and Manchester Universities translation of the monograph by I. Sh. Shifman *Palmyra Duty Tariff* (1980) [41].

Coverage of current activities of Russian archaeologists and restorers faces the same problem since Russian publications are designed exclusively for a Russian-speaking audience. Syrian colleagues mostly do not go beyond the boundaries of publishing summary reports on departmental websites, which are not accompanied by a translation into any common foreign language.

The main obstacles to increasing the volume of fieldwork are connected with the current global political tension and the general complexity of the tasks, requiring the involvement of significant funding and a larger number of local specialists.

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Изучение и сохранение историко-культурного наследия Пальмиры российскими и европейскими исследователями в XVII–XXI вв.

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Данная статья посвящена комплексному изучению вклада российских и западноевропейских ученых в сохранение и изучение археологических памятников древнейшего города ранней античности — Пальмиры. Настоящее исследование призвано систематизировать и синтезировать достижения известных научных археологических школ, ученых и исследователей, занимавшихся сбором и анализом сведений об этом уникальном древнем городе в Малой Азии. Используя методологию структурно-функционального и дескриптивно-компаративного подходов, мы изучили основные хронологические периоды исследования пальмирского историко-культурного комплекса. В работе представлены четыре основные, следующие друг за другом, но в полной мере не взаимозаменяемые онтологические парадигмы: богословская, натурфилософская, архитектурно-окультиная и научно-аналитическая. В этой связи были приведены данные из выверенных источников об истории Пальмиры и трудов по изучению этого города, а также сопоставлены результаты некоторых европейских и четырех российских экспедиций (1882, 1900, 2016 и 2019 гг.). В рамках критического подхода была предпринята попытка дать точное и целостное представление о мотивации представителей

различных интеллектуальных традиций в вопросах изучения культурных памятников Востока на протяжении последних трех столетий развития гуманитарной научной мысли в контексте внутрирегиональных исторических событий, повлиявших как на сохранность, так и на разрушение объектов культурного наследия Сирии. В работе также отмечены достижения цифровых технологий, придающих проблеме восстановления Пальмиры новый импульс, который, очевидно, наметит перспективные горизонты предстоящих масштабных работ в рассматриваемом историческом комплексе, а также актуализирует эффективные стратегии в вопросах восстановления объектов всемирного наследия.

Ключевые слова: Сирия, Россия, Пальмира, историко-культурное наследие, археология, научная дипломатия.

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