

## INTRODUCTION

The painted churches of Lebanon were first noted by the great French archaeologist, Ernest Renan, in 1874, who included them in his comprehensive description of Lebanese antiquities.<sup>1</sup> In 1913, Henri Lammens wrote an Arabic history of Syrian antiquities, including a number of churches with frescoes still visible in his day but which are now destroyed.

After the First World War, in 1924, the French lost no time in beginning archaeological investigations. Charles Virolleaud published the church and frescoes of Mar Phocas, in Amioun, along with the grotto of Mar Marina. Camille Enlart included these frescoes in his detailed study of Crusader monuments, 1925. Charles-Louis Brossé published the first comprehensive article on Mar Marina in 1926, and mentioned other paintings in his contributions to the *Guide Bleu* of 1932. In 1927, Charles Diehl drew the attention of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres to the paintings of Bahdeidat, as a result of which the frescoes of Bahdeidat were „preserved“ under a coat of brown varnish.<sup>2</sup> Pierre Coupel published three medieval churches in 1941, and Jean Lauffray excavated the little church in Beirut, in 1946.

After the Second World War, Jules Leroy, already deeply immersed in work on Coptic frescoes, included some of the Lebanese frescoes in his study of *Monks and Monasteries of the Near East*, 1963,<sup>3</sup> illustrating the frescoes of Deir es-Salib. He then devoted the rest of his life to the study of Syriac manuscripts, while he undertook the first comprehensive studies of Coptic frescoes in Egypt. Both Leroy and Joseph Nasrallah collected and published a number of Arabic sources, both Christian and Moslem, that spoke of medieval Christian painting long vanished, for example in the churches of Baghdad and the Tur Abdin. Meanwhile, Maurice Tallon, in 1962, described the paintings of Sayyidat ad-Darr, including the first inventory of frescoes in the Lebanon and Syria known at that time. This list included most of the frescoes included in the present study, as well as some which have since disappeared.

Interest in the frescoes has increased rapidly within recent years. Our study began in 1971, when Raif Nassif and I set out to examine and photograph what remained of the paintings. Youhanna Sader published a small monograph on three churches, Ma'ad, Eddé and Bahdeidat, in 1987, followed by a major work on the frescoes in 1997. In 1999, Lévon

Nordiguian and Jean-Claude Voisin illustrated most of the painted monuments in their comprehensive volume of Lebanese castles and churches. Articles on especial aspects of the paintings have been explored by Nada Helou and Agnès Rousseau. An inventory of the wall paintings was completed by Mat Immerzeel in 2000.

Byzantine painting and mosaic is a comparatively modern discipline where new monuments and documents are constantly opening up new vistas of understanding. In the field of medieval art, wall paintings have been uncovered and studied in Italy, Greece, Cyprus, Asia Minor, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Armenia, Georgia and Egypt. Recently, Gustave Kühnel completed the study of painting in Palestine, which is comparable to the Lebanon in that the remains are precious and few. There remains a gap along the shores of the Mediterranean represented by Lebanese painting, an area where the greatest historical developments were taking place. The larger study of Byzantine painting has barely touched on monuments in this area.<sup>4</sup> As long as it remained unexamined, an understanding of the cultural history of the Mediterranean basin in the medieval period was incomplete. I have attempted to bridge this gap by publishing two studies: The first one, *The Frescoes of Mar Musa al-Habashi*, describes the paintings of Syria, in particular the frescoes of the Monastery of St. Moses the Ethiopian, near Nebek. The reason for examining Syrian painting first was because the monument of Mar Musa al-Habashi represents the most extensive program of church decoration at a single site in the entire Middle East, documented and almost intact. This made a solid point of departure for the study of Lebanese paintings, which are much more fragmentary and diverse. The present book on Lebanese frescoes continues the earlier study on Syrian painting. Both works are closely interdependent.

The following chapters approach the Lebanese paintings from two points of view. A general study of Lebanese painting depends on the close description of the individual paintings and monuments. This description is given in the catalogue at the end of the text. There, each monument is described and given a number. A black-and-white illustration of every painting is included, along with the painted inscriptions that explain the paintings. In some cases this section includes a description of paintings that disappeared during the course of our work.

1 Full references to the work of the authors cited in the following text is given in the Bibliography of Selected References. Full reference is made here only to those that are not included in the Selected References.

2 Charles Diehl, „Peintures de Bahdidat en Syrie,“ *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* (1927), pp. 328–330.

3 Original edition in French, Paris, 1958.

4 The pioneering works in this area by Doula Mouriki, Lucy-Anne Hunt, Yaroslav Folda and Annemarie Weyl Carr are mentioned in the Selected References and in the following text.

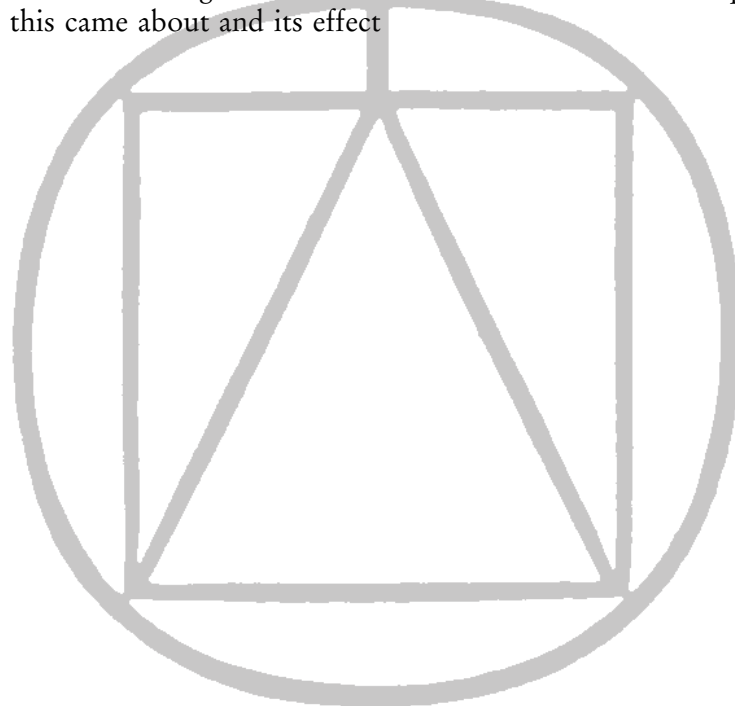
Four introductory chapters interpret these paintings in relation to their context in the wider medieval world. Chapter I briefly recounts the historical events surrounding the monuments which lead to their creation. Chapter II describes the architectural settings in which they occur. Chapter III on iconography and chapter IV on style consider the relationships between these paintings and paintings in the rest of the Mediterranean world.

While Lebanese frescoes are interesting for their own sake, they are also valuable to the larger study of Byzantine and western medieval history. Churches in Lebanon and Syria were painted since earliest Christianity and the painters were not inactive during Moslem occupation. There is an important fact, however, in that most of the visible remains can be dated in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, painted during the period of Crusader occupation of the Levant. A study of this painting throws light on the movement of peoples and ideas brought about by the Crusades. Among all historical circumstances since the fall of the Roman Empire, the Crusades had the most far-reaching impact on European history and culture. Arab history was not unaffected by the Crusades but the greater impulse was from the East to the West. For the Arabs, the Crusades were only an interlude of two centuries, but for Europe the Crusades opened new vistas of knowledge and understanding. Just how all this came about and its effect

on history have not as yet been fully understood. There were momentous impulses that reached across the seas at this time, not the least of them being the burgeoning commerce of the silk route and the approach of the Mongols. Syrian and Lebanese painting reflect changes of this kind during this specific period.<sup>5</sup>

One of the principal questions in this cultural interchange is the question of Jerusalem. How central was the part played by this multi-cultural community in the development of medieval history of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries?

Further, the movement of peoples during the Crusades led to patterns of influence. There were painted churches in neighbouring centers, in Cyprus, Byzantium, Cappadocia, Palestine, Egypt and Syria. The contact between various groups resulted in the transmission of ideas and thoughts from one area to another. The most fertile ground for cross-fertilization was the Levant, and ideas moved with great rapidity across the Mediterranean during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The vigorous and colourful society of Outremer created a fabric with complicated textures. The attempt to untangle some of the threads may not only throw light upon our understanding of medieval history in the Mediterranean basin, but it may also explain certain aspects of the East and the West we experience today.



5 In this area, as early as 1966 Kurt Weitzmann (Weitzmann, *Icon Painting*), explored relationships between paintings from Italy, Sinai and Cyprus. He further developed this study in 1975 (Weitzmann, *Cyprus*). Recently, Annemarie Weyl Carr examines the relationship between Orthodox and Frankish patronage in Cyprus: „Correlative Spaces: Art, Identity, and Appropriation in Lusignan Cyprus,“ *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook*, 14/15 (1998/1999), pp. 59–80.