The History of the Collection

The Janus Pannonius Museum of Pécs has been in possession of a remarkable collection of Islamic ceramics for more than fifty years, a collection which has rightly aroused the interest of researchers in the field. The collection, hitherto completely unknown, was purchased during a trip to the Near East in 1887-1888 by Miklós Zsolnay, son of Vilmoss Zsolnay, the founder in Pécs of a ceramics factory of European renown (Hárs 1996:37). After being stored in the Zsolnay family’s private museum for over sixty years, the material was moved to its current location following the factory’s nationalisation in 1948 (Hárs 1996:53; Gerelyes & Kovács 1999:15).

The fashionable practices of the period and certain business considerations may all have induced Vilmoss Zsolnay to send his son on a study trip of several-months duration. We can reconstruct Miklós Zsolnay’s trip quite accurately on the basis of his dairy, kept in German and held in the family archive, as well as from his letters to the family, also written in German. When Zsolnay returned from his journey, he did not come empty-handed. During his trip he had purchased a large and extremely valuable collection of ceramics. The collection can be divided into two completely separate units, one consisting of wall tiles, and the other comprising ceramics from Fustat; it is the latter collection that forms the subject of the present paper (Gerelyes & Kovács 1999:15). Both in his choice of route and in his selection of items, Zsolnay followed in the wake of the artists and art collectors, consuls and army officers roaming the “fabulous East”. He used almost exactly the same route that the English painter Lord Frederic Leighton had completed twenty years earlier. Lord Leighton visited Rhodes, Bursa and Smyrna (Izmir) in 1867, then travelled to Egypt in 1868 and to Damascus five years later (Simon 1996:16). Zsolnay, and many others, followed the same itinerary. In one of his letters from Cairo, he himself made the comment that he encountered the very same people here that he had bumped into in Istanbul. Nor could it be mere coincidence that Major Myers, who took part in a farewell party held in Sephards Hotel in Cairo on December 27, 1887, was probably the same person who years later purchased large quantities of Near-Eastern, primarily Syrian and Egyptian, ceramics for the Victoria and Albert Museum of London. We can reconstruct Zsolnay’s journey as follows: He set out early in November, 1887. His first letter was dated October 18 while still on Hungarian territory, from Mohács. He arrived in Constantinople on October 24. During the month he spent in the Turkish capital, he mostly visited architectural monuments, the mosques. He
procured permission to make copies of the tiles covering the inside walls with the help of transparent paper. In all probability he bought the collection’s Iznik pieces, dated from about the second half of the 16th century, in Istanbul. Early in November he made a brief, two-day-long excursion to Bursa, where he studied the tile covering of the Yeshil mosque and its türbe (mausoleum). His last letter from Constantinople was dated November 21. His next correspondence was sent during a boat journey in the Aegean Sea. In late November he visited Izmir, Larnaca, and Cyprus. During the next three weeks or so, he completed the journey from Beirut through Baalbek, Damascus, Jerusalem and Port Said to Cairo. According to his diary, he made his most important purchases in Damascus, where he bought over a hundred pieces of 16th and 17th-century Damascene tiles, that still form part of the collection today1.

From the point of view of the Fustat collection of ceramics, Zsolnay’s stay in Egypt is a great deal more important. Zsolnay arrived in Cairo on December 19. Here he made the acquaintance of the Egyptian government’s Minister of Finance, the Hungarian-born Blum Pasha2. Blum Pasha introduced Zsolnay to Max (Miksa) Herz, the architect who was also of Hungarian ancestry. We shall return to Herz later, because he - apparently - came to play an important role in shipping the Fustat collection to Hungary. After spending Christmas in Cairo, Zsolnay went on a two-week trip on the Nile on December 28. In the letters he sent from here he mostly wrote about the art of ancient Egypt. He returned to Cairo on January 10, 1888; and then left the Egyptian capital a few days later. His next message was sent from Athens on January 28. Here he met the German archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann. Following a brief stay in Athens, he returned to Hungary via Rome in February 1888.

We have very little information about Zsolnay’s purchases in Egypt. During the first days of his stay in Cairo, he mentioned that he was not likely to buy much here, because, as he put it: “valuable Arab items are hard to come by, and Egyptian rarities interest me very little.” Despite his earlier plans, however, he did purchase some carpets and Qur’an holders in the Cairo bazaars, according to his diary. Unfortunately, I have been unable to find any information as to when and under what circumstances he had bought the rather large collection of Fustat ceramics (approximately 4,000 fragments). I presume, without being able to prove it, that he bought them on the advice of the previously mentioned Miksa Herz. Miksa Herz went to stay in Egypt in October 1880. In early 1881, he joined the Technical Bureau of the Waqf Office, where he worked in the architect team until 1890s. The head of the Bureau, Pasha Julius Franz, retired in 1887 and recommended Miksa Herz as his replacement.

1 Miksa Herz was appointed to head the Arab Museum (today the Museum of Islamic Art) in 1892. In 1901 he was officially named as Director of the Institute. On his eventful and successful life, see Ormos (in press). I would like to use this opportunity to express my gratitude to István Ormos for the information he made available to me.

2 For a detailed description of the journey, see Gerelyes & Kovács 1999:15-21.

3 Gyula Blum was born in 1843 in Pest. He worked as Director of the Austro-Egyptian Bank after 1869. He became under-secretary of the Treasury in 1877, and was made Pasha and Minister two years later.

The restoration and cataloguing of the collection have still not been completed. The aim of the present article is to present this previously unpublished collection to the world by listing the main types, thus opening the way for further research. Both the site and the history of excavations are well known from the literature (Scanlon 1965:7-9). During the earliest Islamic conquests, the Arab armies established military bases over all the occupied territory. Conquered in AD 641, one such base was al-Fustat, which later grew into a town of substance. More than three hundred years later, in AD 969, Ğawhar, the military commander of the Fātimid Dynasty...
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Miklós Zsolnay purchased the collection either in December 1887 or in early 1888. Therefore, he bought it eight years before Fredrik R. Martin concluded what could rightly be termed the first planned research, and decades before ‘Ali Bahgat started his research work (Vernoit 1997:5). The area was a favourite site for treasure hunters. Zsolnay’s collection precisely matched the Fustat material acquired for other European collections at the end of the 19th century. The circumstances under which he obtained them can explain why, despite of having thousands of fragments, we are able to reconstruct only a few vessels. The restoration and cataloguing of the collection have still not been completed. The aim of the present article is to present this previously unpublished collection to the world by listing the main types, thus opening the way for further research.

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4 Iparmûvészeti Múzeum, Budapest. Éva Csenkey called my attention to the collection of Fustat ceramics owned by the Museum of Applied Arts. I would like to express my gratitude for the help she has given me in my work.

(969-1171) that conquered North Africa, marked the site for the new capital, Cairo, north of Fustat. Caliph al-Mu'izz moved to the new centre, developed specifically for him, four years later. Nevertheless, Fustat's significance was preserved during subsequent centuries. Right up to circa 1075 the most important ceramics workshops of the Islamic world were to be found in this district. Sometime after 1168, when the area of pottery workshops burnt down and there was a mass exodus of skilled potters Fustat district started to lose its importance. In subsequent centuries one part of Fustat became a dumping ground for Cairo's rubbish, which made it into a treasure house for collectors of later periods. The huge quantities of ceramics, mostly fragments or rejects, that were uncovered in excavations in Fustat not only testify to the skills of local workshops, but also bear witness to the craftsmanship of Iranian, Chinese, Spanish and Italian potters whose works were exported here in large volumes.

THE COLLECTION

The Fāṭimid (969-1171) and Ayyūbid (1171-1250) periods

Water bottle filters

The water bottle filters constitute a characteristic group among the Fustat collection's ceramics from the early Fāṭimid period. With their pierced filters of geometrical designs arranged in radial, triangular, and concentric circles, the pieces in the Zsolnay collection belong to the simplest type. They dated to between the 10th and the 12th centuries inclusively. (Fig. 1.)

Oil lamps

The Fustat material contains oil lamps in vast quantities - over several thousand, which were uncovered either during regular excavations led by archaeologists or in the course of earlier "treasure hunts" (Kubiak 1970:1). As a result, Islamic collections all over the world contain lamps from Fustat in large numbers. The Zsolnay pieces fit the range of the known types well, dating back to the Fāṭimid period, i.e. the second half of the 11th century and the 12th century.

Lustre painted ceramics

The Zsolnay collection of lustre painted ceramics is extremely rich and quite complex. The time range for the collection are set by the 9th-century polychrome fragments from the period of the 'Abbāsīd-dynasty and 15th-century pieces from Valencia. A considerable part of the collection is made up of fragments golden painted against a light background from the Fāṭimid period (Fig.2.) and, to a lesser extent, by fragments with a turquoise glaze lustre-painted in gold (Fig.3.). The rest of the fragments are small, mostly coming from flat bowls set on a low foot.

The Mamlūk Age

The Bahri (1250-1390) and the Burgi Periods (1382-1517)

Underglaze painted Vessels

The most common type of vessels during the Bahri period was painted under a colourless glaze in blue or black. These vessels were produced in large quantities both in Syria and in Egypt. As a result of the free movement of the masters, it is practically impossible nowadays to distinguish between the products of workshops in the two areas (Atil 1981:146). The Zsolnay collection has a large number of pieces representing this type of vessel. Together with the 15th-century Chinese version of the same type, approximately one-third of the collection consists of fragments belonging to this category. These fragments once formed part of some surprisingly coarse vessels with rather thick wall made of white or yellowish-white gritted clay, mostly of flat or deep bowls and larger jugs. The paint, mostly blue or black, and less commonly turquoise or green, was applied on a thin layer of slip which covered the clay body. The painted surface was covered with a transparent, or sometimes greenish, glaze, which allowed the pattern underneath to show. Quite often this layer of glaze turned out to be thicker than intended, accumulating either at the inside bottom or at the outside base. The Zsolnay collection has an especially large number of vessels rejected because of faulty glazing. The wasters are especially important, because they prove the items' Egyptian origin. Despite such technical deficiencies and smaller faults, this type of vessel was attractive and decorative, at the same time being very handy for everyday use. Among the favourite motifs used to decorate the inside of the dishes were the triangular panels separated by blue lines and arranged radially, which were alternately filled with floral and geometrical elements (Fig.4.). In the latter case, the pattern left white stood out sharply from the hatched black background. In another favourite type of design, one of the alternate panels was filled with inscriptions, actual or imitation. Similarly popular were the floral, Arabesque or simplified geometrical elements arranged in concentric circles. Related to this type, but emerging somewhat later and continuing to survive well into the Burgi period, are some vessels painted in black under the blue, turquoise or green glaze (Fig.5.). The Zsolnay collection has a large number of similar, 15th-century

6 Gerelyes & Kovács 1999:Fig. 30/a. See: Philon 1980:77-78. Plate VIIA.
(969-1171) that conquered North Africa, marked the site for the new capital, Cairo, north of Fustat. Caliph al-Mu'izz moved to the new centre, developed specifically for him, four years later. Nevertheless, Fustat's significance was preserved during subsequent centuries. Right up to circa 1075 the most important ceramics workshops of the Islamic world were to be found in this district. Sometime after 1168, when the area of pottery workshops burnt down and there was a mass exodus of skilled potters, Fustat district started to lose its importance. In subsequent centuries one part of Fustat became a dumping ground for Cairo's rubbish, which made it into a treasure house for collectors of later periods. The huge quantities of ceramics, mostly fragments or rejects, that were uncovered in excavations in Fustat not only testify to the skills of local workshops, but also bear witness to the craftsmanship of Iranian, Chinese, Spanish and Italian potters whose works were exported here in large volumes.

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contradicted collection bought in Egypt, it must have been made in Egypt. This is, however, outside during the firing process, there is a fragment from the rim of another vessel-century date of origin. In the inside the cockspur marks are still visible. Stuck to the display shows close resemblances with the early Iznik ware, suggesting a late-15-century date of origin. In the inside the cockspur marks are still visible. Stuck to the display shows close resemblances with the early Iznik ware, suggesting a late-15-

The 15th century witnessed the emergence of a new type of vessel with an underglaze painted in blue. The 14th-century Ming porcelain vessels began to exert an increasingly strong influence after the beginning of the 15th century (Carswell 1985:32). In part, this was reflected in the accurate copying of the Chinese archetypes, as shown by the pieces in Fig. 6. The shallow plates set on a low foot, were made of coarse white clay. The details of the graphic work in the pattern painted on the inside in blue are very fine and elaborate. Some of the items deserves special attention on account of the multiple tones of the lotus flower, which evokes archetypes from graphic works, rather than from porcelain decoration. The colouring of this items is also unusual, insofar as it comes close to cobalt. The vessels shown on Figure 6 were also made of a coarse white clay composition, and were underglaze painted in blue. Unlike the examples discussed earlier, these fragments are decorated with a somewhat simplified and rudimentary version of the motifs familiar from Chinese porcelain ware made in the second half of the 14th century, such as the lotus flowers, elongated leaves and foliaged tendrils. They belong, therefore to the second group of blue-and-white Chinoiserie. In the case of several items in the Zsolnay collection, the precise analogies are known from other collections. Partly on the basis of these precise analogies, and partly from the masters' signatures found on items in the collection, this group of exhibits can quite safely be linked to the 15th-century Egyptian workshop of Gaybi10.

In the category of underglaze painted vessels, a smaller group composed of only a few items, deserves special attention (Fig. 7). Fragments of basis, bottoms and rims belonging to flat dishes constitute this group. The coarse and quite often rather thick material of the vessels, made of white or greyish-white clay mixed with gravel, is in sharp contrast with the fine graphics of the decoration. First, a thin layer of slip was applied, on which the decoration was executed in three colours, black, blue and brownish-red. This was then covered with a transparent glaze of very high quality. Evoking the world of miniatures, the finely drawn pictures had the following characteristics: human or animal representation, such as the figure holding a cup (Fig. 7) or the partial figure of a bird; actual inscriptions or imitation Kūfī inscriptions; and the Arabesque (Fig. 7). Although the fragment of geometric decoration in Fig. 7 do not fit the thematic character of the group, they undoubtedly belong here on technical grounds. Researchers date this group of ceramics either to the end of the 12th century or the beginning of the 13th century. Although opinions vary as to the actual workshops associated with the various towns, the Syrian origin of the ceramics is generally accepted. Therefore, this type of ceramics was imported to Egypt11.

Mamlūk incised pottery

Approximately one third of the complete collection belongs to this type, which was produced over a period of roughly a hundred years beginning in the late 13th century. This means that with its several hundreds of Mamlūk incised pieces, the Zsolnay collection has an outstanding significance.

The coat of arms referring to the owners' title, or more precisely to their office, the emirate, was placed in a circle in the interior of the vessels. The most common signs are the cup, the napkin, the sword, the target, and the polo stick (Fig. 8), in other words, the sign of the cup bearer, the master of the robes, the sword-bearer, and the master of the polo game (Mayer 1933:4-5). There are a large number of pieces

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8 The vessels painted in black under the transparent turquoise glaze emerged as early as the 12th century in Iran. Grube 1994: Cat. no. 201-202, then, in the 13th century, they also appeared in Syria, most notably in Rakka. Soustiel 1985: 115. On their survival into the 14th and 15th century see Atīl 1981:149-150.

9 Atīl 1981:150.; The vessel has recently been published. Cf. Gerelyes 2001: Fig. 11.

10 Peterson (1980), for example, Plate 4, XIII, shows a remarkable resemblance to fragments Nos. 1 and 2 in Fig. 14. Several pieces in the Zsolnay collection, not published in the present paper, are identical to the items published by Peterson (1980) in Plate 3, 6 and by Abel (1930) in Plate V-VI-X. The fragment published by Abel (1930) in Plate XII/59 bears a close resemblance to the item marked no. 2 in Fig. 13 in the present paper, while Plate XXII/104 shows a striking similarity with article no. 1 Fig. 13.

11 The figure holding a cup on the fragment marked 3 in Fig. 15 resembles No. 212 in Grube (1976). The two fragments display such similarity that it is almost as if they belonged to the same piece. The rim fragment decorated with an Arabesque, marked 2 in Fig. 15, is also very close to the bowl marked Cat. No. 332. in Grube (1994), while the rim fragment imitating Kūfī writing published also in Fig. 15, resembles the decoration of the bowl marked in the said publication as Cat. No. 287. We can read about the Syrian towns identified as possible places of origin in the description of this item.
This is, therefore, a wastage, and provided it actually did form part of the Zsolnay collection bought in Egypt, it must have been made in Egypt. This is, however, outside during the firing process, there is a fragment from the rim of another vessel—

Another deep bowl standing on a small foot. The pattern is underglaze painted in black: the inside of the bowl is decorated with radially arranged leaf-like tendrils, the outside is decorated with a green glaze painted in blue. Unlike the examples discussed earlier, these fragments are decorated with a graphic work, rather than from porcelain decoration. The colouring of this items is also unusual, insofar as it comes close to cobalt.

The 15th century witnessed the emergence of a new type of vessel with an underglaze painted in black. The 14th-century Ming porcelain vessels began to exert an increasingly strong influence after the beginning of the 15th century (Carswell 1985:31). In part, this was reflected in the accurate copying of the Chinese archetypes, as shown by the pieces in Fig. 6. The shallow plates set on a low foot, were made of coarse white clay. The details of the graphic work in the pattern painted on the inside in blue are very fine and elaborate. Some of the items deserves special attention on account of the multiple tones of the lotus flower, which evokes archetypes from graphic works, rather than from porcelain decoration. The colouring of this items is also unusual, insofar as it comes close to cobalt. The vessels shown on Figure 6 were also made of a coarse white clay composition, and were underglaze painted in blue.

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in the collection which feature the symbol of the five or six-petal rosette, originally symbolising the ruling power but eventually becoming a simple decorative element as well as the lily (Mayer 1933:22-24). Less frequently, we can find examples where two different types were combined, for example the lily and the sword. In some cases, the interior of the circle is divided into three parts with lines coloured differently from the background, with the coat of arms placed in this inner band. Researchers associated this latter type with the period beginning with the second quarter of the 14th century and lasting throughout the Bahrí period (1390) (Atil 1981:20). The animal representations form a separate group. The eagle, a relatively rarely used symbol, and the lion represented the Sultan's power, while the rather numerous fish representations only served decorative purposes (Atil 1981:20). The collection preserved a very large number of mass produced items with geometric decorations. The ceramics made for emirs and decorated with heraldic signs disappeared in the 15th century. They were replaced by single colour glazed pottery with slip painted ornamental decoration, made of identical material and of identical quality. Two examples of this type are shown in Fig. 9, with the tripods stuck into it during firing still visible.

Ceramics imported from China

Celadon

As early as the mid-12th century, Egypt was flooded with Lung-Ch'iian ceramics of Chinese origin that were already copied by Egyptian potters in the Ayyubid period (Scanlon 1971:88-89). The import of Celadon ceramics from China continued throughout the Mamlük period and definitely lasted until 1400 (Scanlon 1971:90). The pieces that were uncovered in largest numbers during the Fustát archaeological excavations were green glazed articles dated from the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1279-1368), either decorated with incised or relief-motifs of fish, chrysanthemums, pointed leaves, or left completely undecorated. The Zsolnay collection displays a similar composition. The number of Celadon vessels is relatively small, and not a single vessel could be put together from the fragments. The two fragments in Fig. 10 represent four different types. The fourth fragment chipped off from the foot and bottom of a large bowl. Under the water green glaze on both in its interior and its side, there is an incised decoration: a lotus flower in the middle, surrounded by lotuses and pointed leaves all strung on a stalk. The an other item published here is the ribbed yet smooth fragment of a large, light green bowl with an everted rim. (Fig. 10)

During the Mamlük period, and most notably in the Bahri period, Egyptian potters copied Celadon ceramics in large quantities. A familiarity with the composition of other Fustát collections or with the archaeological material of the Fustát excavations will find it less surprising to find a large number of Mamlük copies of Chinese Celadon ceramics (Scanlon 1984:116-118). The items presented here are fragments from the foot and the bottom of footed bowls (Fig.11.). The fourth fragment in Fig.

10. is made from gritted red clay. This piece displays the marks left behind by the tripod in the interior, as well as visible signs of having been stuck to another vessel at two points. Both the inside and the outside of the vessel are glazed in dark green, and its interior is decorated in a lighter tone: pointed leaves in a radial arrangement set in the relief-like frame depicting a string of pearls. An other piece is made of light brown clay and covered both inside and outside in a light green glaze and featuring an impressed rose in the interior and details from an incomprehensible pattern on the side. The second piece in Figure 10 has a considerably finer execution, finely thrown and made of a light yellow clay. This is the fragment of a bowl set on a higher foot. It is covered in a light yellowish-green glaze both inside and outside, and has an incised pattern in the interior: darker brown Arabesques and circles. There is a drop of dark green glaze in the centre. The Zsolnay collection contains a large number of similarly executed bowl fragments with incised decoration, glazed in a single colour. However, unlike the Celadon ceramics, their glazing might also come in yellowish-brown, light brown, turquoise or even deep lilac colours.

Porcelain

The other extremely important group of ceramics imported from China consists of blue-and-white porcelain from the period of the Ming Dynasty12. Researchers put the date of the appearance of blue-and-white porcelain in Egypt at a very early date, 1326. The surviving archaeological finds have confirmed beyond doubt that some articles made in the second quarter of the 14th century had already reached Fustát. Chinese porcelain production of the 15th century failed to reach Syria and Egypt, due to Timur Lenk's invasion in 1400-1401 and the subsequent decline. This is precisely the factor that motivated local potters to produce underglaze-painted ceramics in blue with imitation Chinese motifs as described above (Figs. 6). The import of Chinese porcelain started to gather momentum again only after the end of the 15th century. We have evidence to show that this process continued throughout the 17th century, and lasted well into the 18th century.

The Zsolnay collection has only a small number of Chinese porcelain fragments. In our selection for Figures 12 we tried to include different types. The second fragment illustrates one of the characteristic types of Chinese porcelain made around the middle of the 14th century. The motif of birds floating on lotus-pond is also well known from intact pieces (Carswell 1985: Fig. 13/a; Carswell 1999: Fig. 15).

12 The majority of the blue-and-white Chinese porcelain ware produced in the 14th century was intended for Islamic countries. See: Medley 1976:178.
in the collection which feature the symbol of the five or six-petal rosette, originally symbolising the ruling power but eventually becoming a simple decorative element as well as the lily (Mayer 1933:22-24). Less frequently, we can find examples where two different types were combined, for example the lily and the sword. In some cases, the interior of the circle is divided into three parts with lines coloured differently from the background, with the coat of arms placed in this inner band. Researchers associated this latter type with the period beginning with the second quarter of the 14th century and lasting throughout the Bahri period (1390) (Atil 1981: items 94 and 95). The animal representations form a separate group. The eagle, a relatively rarely used symbol, and the lion represented the Sultan’s power, while the rather numerous fish representations only served decorative purposes (Atil 1981:20). The collection preserved a very large number of mass produced items with geometric-decorations. The ceramics made for emirs and decorated with heraldic signs disappeared in the 15th century. They were replaced by single colour glazed pottery with slip painted ornamental decoration, made of identical material and of identical quality. Two examples of this type are shown in Fig. 9, with the tripods stuck into it during firing still visible.

Ceramics imported from China

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Summary

In terms of its size, Miklós Zsolnay’s collection of ceramics from Fustát ranks among the finest European collections of its kind. In its composition, the collection faithfully follows that of other known collections of Fustát ceramics. By reviewing the main ceramic types in the collection, this paper only provided a cross-section of the wealth of material in it. In terms of numbers it only covers perhaps a couple of thousand of the actual volume of vessels. Since the work of research and analysis has still not been completed, this paper should be seen as a preliminary report.

I am greatly indebted to the Max van Berchem Foundation. The Max van Berchem Foundation is a scientific foundation established in Geneva, Switzerland, in memory of Max van Berchem (1863-1921), the founder of Arabic epigraphy. Its aim is to promote the study of Islamic and Arabic archaeology, history, geography, art, epigraphy, religion and literature. It has been subsidising the cataloguing of the Miklós Zsolnay collection since 1997.

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The area of research

The lines above were written by the Crusader pilgrim Burchard of Mount Sion praising the richness of the Terre de Calife a sub-region of the northern part of the Crusader County of Tripoli (Burchardus, Descriptio 29). The County has varied topographical features. It consists of a rather narrow coastal strip which gives way to a hilly region that finally ends in the high ranges of Mount Lebanon, and to the north, the Ansariyya Mountains. The two mountains are divided by the Gap of Homs, a natural passage between the ancient cities of Homs and Tripoli, dotted with hills and cut through by deep riverbeds, the most important one being the Nahr al-Kabir that forms the boundary between present-day Syria and Lebanon. The fertile area not only offered favourable settlement conditions through the millennia, but, being the only easily accessible natural highway between the interior of Syria and the coast, also possessed great strategical value. This latter role acquired additional importance with the establishment of the County of Tripoli, which was confined to the Western side of the mountains. The Muslim armies would always approach Tripoli and Tortosa (today Tartus), the main Crusader centres on the coast through the Gap. The increased menace to the area in Crusader times initiated a strategy which generated a strong architectural manifestation as well. A series of fortifications were built, the finest of them being Chastel Blanc (today Safita) and the world-famous Crac des Chevaliers.

The above-mentioned area is still amongst the richest agricultural areas of the Levant and has preserved a good deal of those monuments which testify to its flowering in the 12th and 13th centuries too. The fieldwork of the summer of 2000 concentrated on sites of the region to the north of the Nahr al-Kabir, that is present-day Syria. The work was done with the kind permission of the Directorate of

1 For the detailed geo-ecological description of the area of the Gap see: Maqdissi 1989 and Sapin 1989.