A color photograph of Pope John Paul II in Syria. The Pope, wearing his white cassock and zucchetto, is standing on a balcony or platform, waving with his right hand. He is surrounded by a large crowd of people, including Syrian soldiers in blue berets and dark uniforms, and other men in suits and clerical attire. In the foreground, a Syrian flag (red, white, and black with a green star) is visible on the left, and a yellow flag is being held up by a person in the crowd. The background shows the stone archway of a building.

# Muslim-Christian relations in Syria

Holy Innocents' Orpington



# Vatican II





Nostra aetate 28 Oktober 1965



DECLARATION ON  
THE RELATION OF THE CHURCH  
TO NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS

# *Islam*

- The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God.

- 
- Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion.
- 

# Interreligious dialogue



Our Mission



To witness Jesus



Prayer



Dialogue



Evangelizing



Assisi 1986

- Encounter of prayer with other religions
- Challenge of terrorism
- Challenge of immigration: dividing Europe

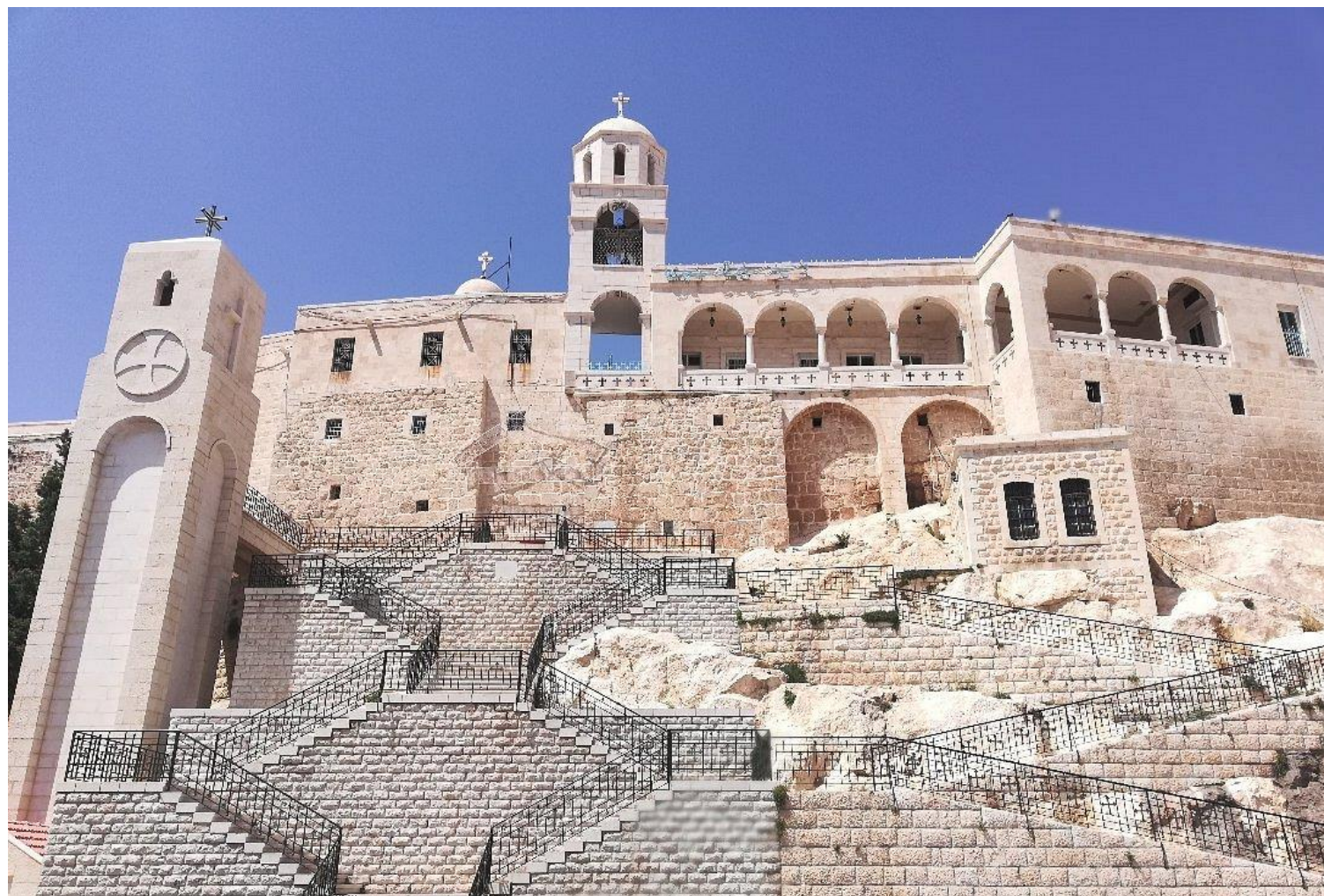




# Islam in Syria

- Constructions
- Architecture
- Conservation of the Christian heritage
- New civilization built upon byzantine and Persian patrimony





Our lady of  
Saidnaya



# Our Lady of Saidnaya Patriarchal Monastery

is a monastery of the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch located in Saidnaya.

one of the most ancient monasteries, traditionally held to have been founded by Byzantine emperor Justinian I in 547 AD.

It is run by a religious order of nuns. It is an important pilgrimage site for Christians, who visit an icon of Saint Mary which is attributed to Saint Luke.



# Ma'lula



# Saint Sergius

---

- It was built on the site of a pagan temple, and has elements which go back to the fifth to sixth century.







- Convent  
Saint Thecla



# Saint Thecla

- a noble virgin and pupil of Paul the Apostle. According to later legend not in the *Acts*, Thecla was being pursued by soldiers of her father to capture her because of her Christian faith. She came upon a mountain, and after praying, the mountain split open and let her escape through. The town gets its name from this gap or entrance in the mountain.

A nighttime photograph of the Umayyad Mosque of Damascus. The image shows the illuminated facade of the mosque, featuring a large central dome and a series of arches. In the foreground on the right, there is a prominent, ornate minaret with a greenish-brown facade and a large dome. The sky is dark, and a bright light source, possibly the moon, is visible in the upper left. The text "Umayyad Mosque of Damascus" is overlaid in white, sans-serif font across the center of the image.

# Umayyad Mosque of Damascus





Dome of the Rock





Qusayr 'Amra





# Qusayr 'Amra

The frescoes on the inside walls.

The frescoes are markers of the birth and evolution of Islamic Art, especially during the Umayyad Period.

Hunting scenes, bathing scenes, animals, vegetal motifs, mythological figures, and religious scenes





# The six kings

the caliph's supremacy  
over his enemies





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## Childhood in Damascus

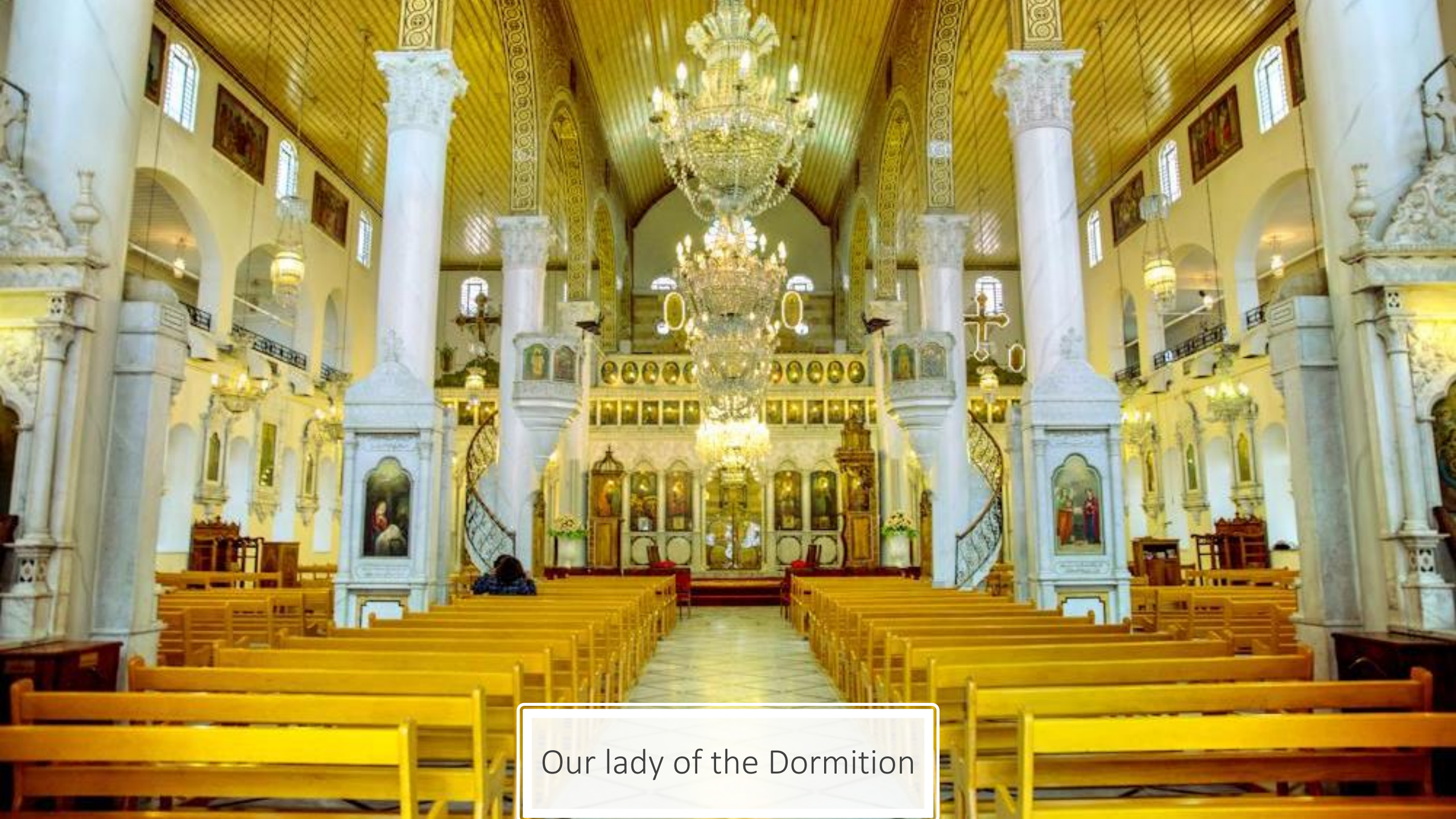
- I was born in 1976, in the old city of Damascus, in the Christian area, between many churches, where I participated in the Mass in different rites, Melkite, Latin, Armenian, Siro-catholic...
- I studied at the elementary **school of Charity**, near the church of saint **Ananias**, the famous disciple who was sent by Jesus to restore the sight of Saul of Tarsus.



# Ananias Church







Our lady of the Dormition



# Nationalism

The Syrian government at that time was socialist, adopting the famous slogan of the Arab nationalism:

**“Religion is for God  
the Fatherland is for everyone”.**

Arab nationalism was born to protect Arab people from the ottomans and to safeguard the rights of the different religious minorities and ethnicities. It was about inclusive secularism that allowed all citizens to live and to work in peace.

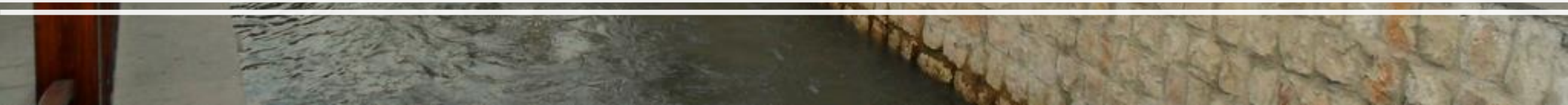




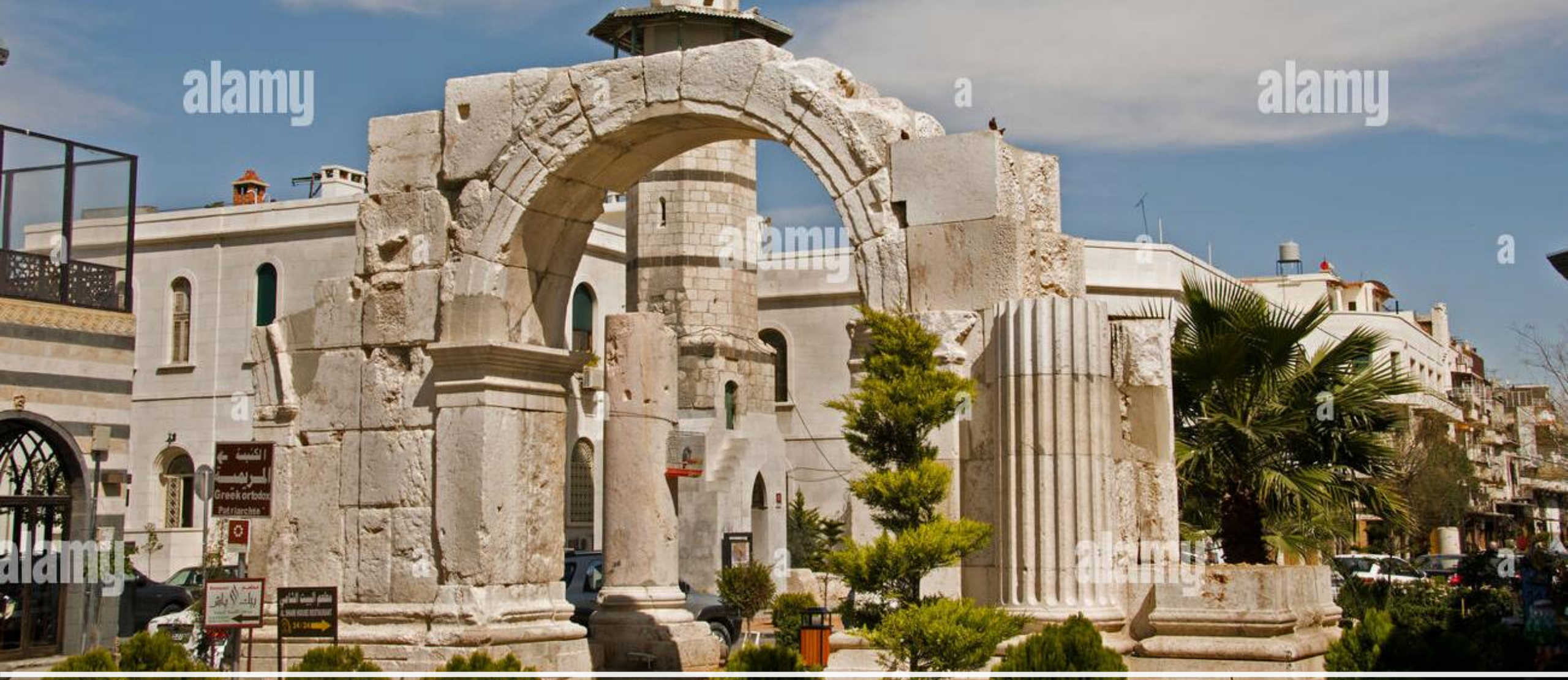




Damascus







Jupiter Temple



## Sunni and Shia: The Worlds of Islam



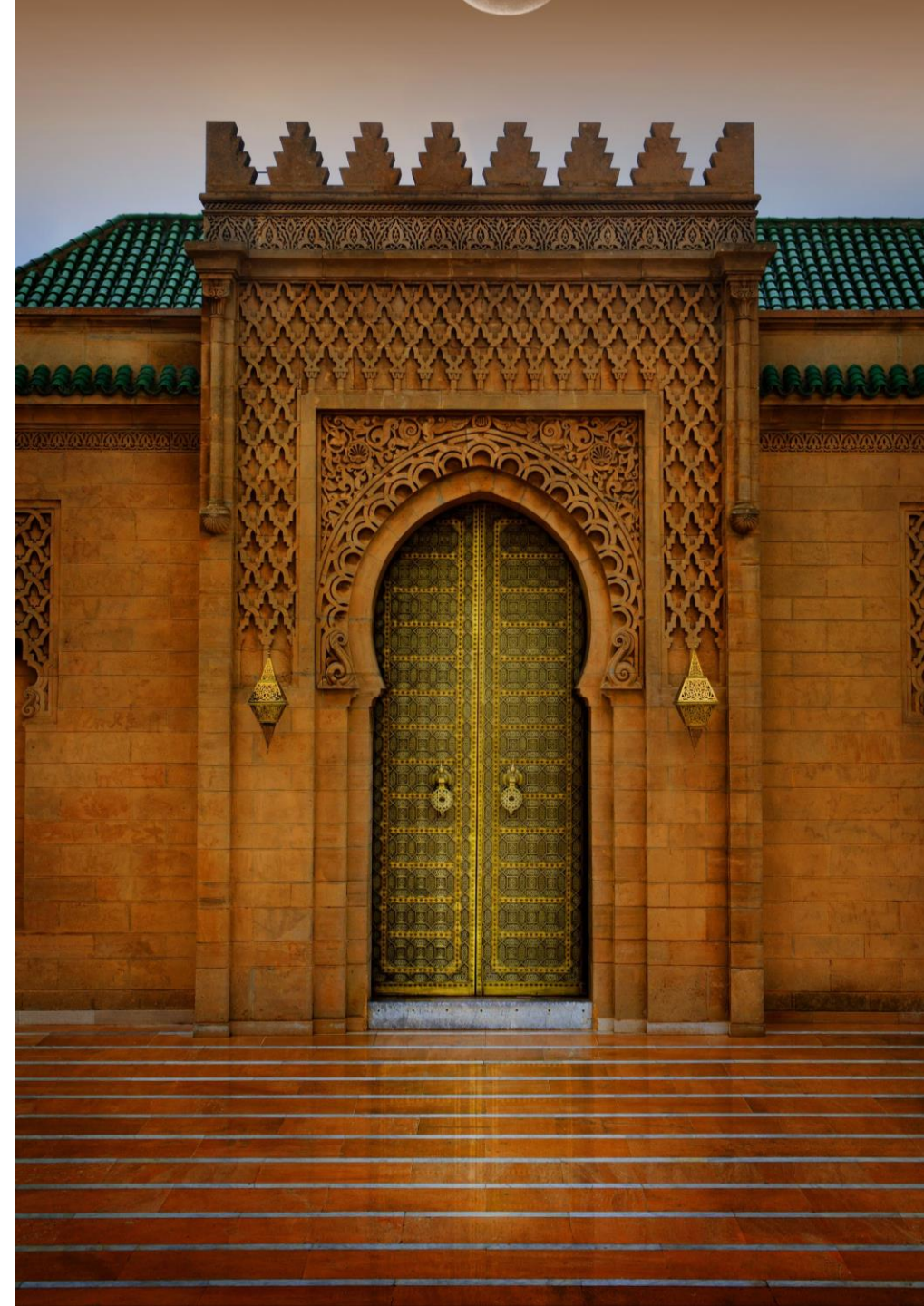






# Sunni Islam

- In the beautiful area of Bab Touma (Damascus), I had some **Muslim neighbors**. First of all, there were two **Sunni families** next door; they practiced Islam, old women wore the veil and adults observed the fasting of Ramadan. But still, they visited us every day, the children played and studied with us, we ate together, girls and boys.
- The only **shock** I had was when I saw one of them after his **migration to Saudi Arabia**; he became completely a different person, fundamentalist and distanced himself from me and other Christians.



# Shiite Islam

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- The second experience was with a **Shiite family** who lived near the **Mosque of Umayyad**.
- Two young men and two young girls who didn't wear the veil and often came to visit us and vice versa.
- I remember the nice days and the beautiful evenings spent together talking and eating.
- I was invited several times to the delicious *Iftar* that they prepared after the fast. They are still so kind till now, nothing could change their good nature even the devastating Syrian war.







Sitt Zaynab



# Islamisation of Arab society

During the 1950s and 60s, Islamic movements received a great financial subvention from Petro-Islamic agencies that created new public educational institutions motivated by hostility towards social progress and secular ideologies in the name of Islamic authenticity.

**Bin Laden was a late product of this ideology!** There is a direct connection between the rise of Islamism and the western strategy against the Soviet Union.





Bin Laden &  
Al-Zawahiri



# Iraqi war

---

**After the war in Iraq 2003 it was clear that the region would explode because the defeat of Saddam created a geopolitical imbalance.**

---

**Shia Islam in Iraq took power and Iran became the strongest power in the region, so George W. Bush failed to destroy Iranian domination.**

---

**The conflict between Sunni and Shia escalated**

---

**Christians exiled from their cities by the ISIS**

---

**The shock the muslim neighbors helped ISIS against Christians**

---





Arab Spring

## New Middle East

Since 2011 the situation changed with respect to the Arab uprisings. The war in Syria surprised the entire world

In the meantime, I worked with Muslim immigrants in Germany during my summer service in the Archdiocese of Freiburg.



# Pacific uprising



## Bloody war





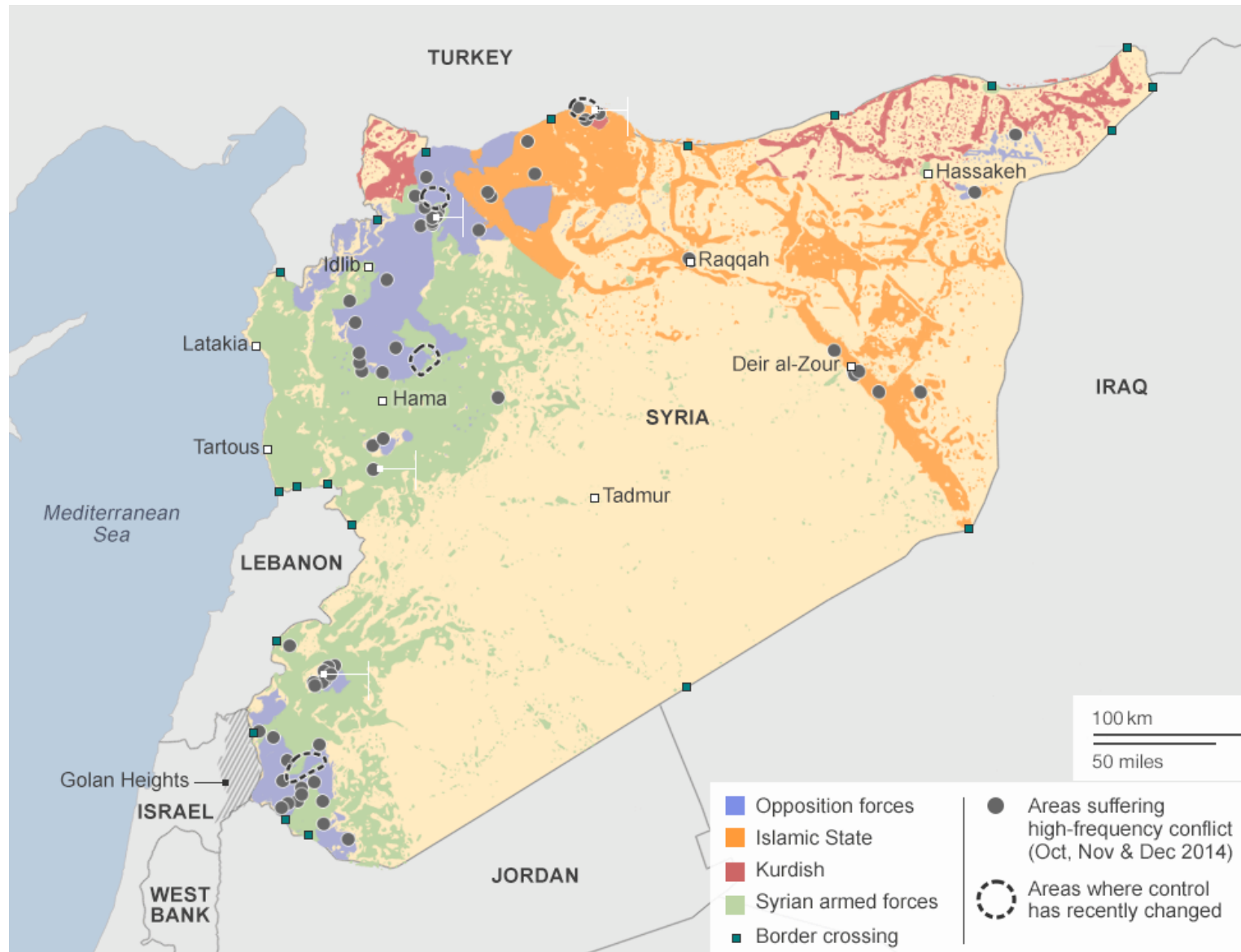


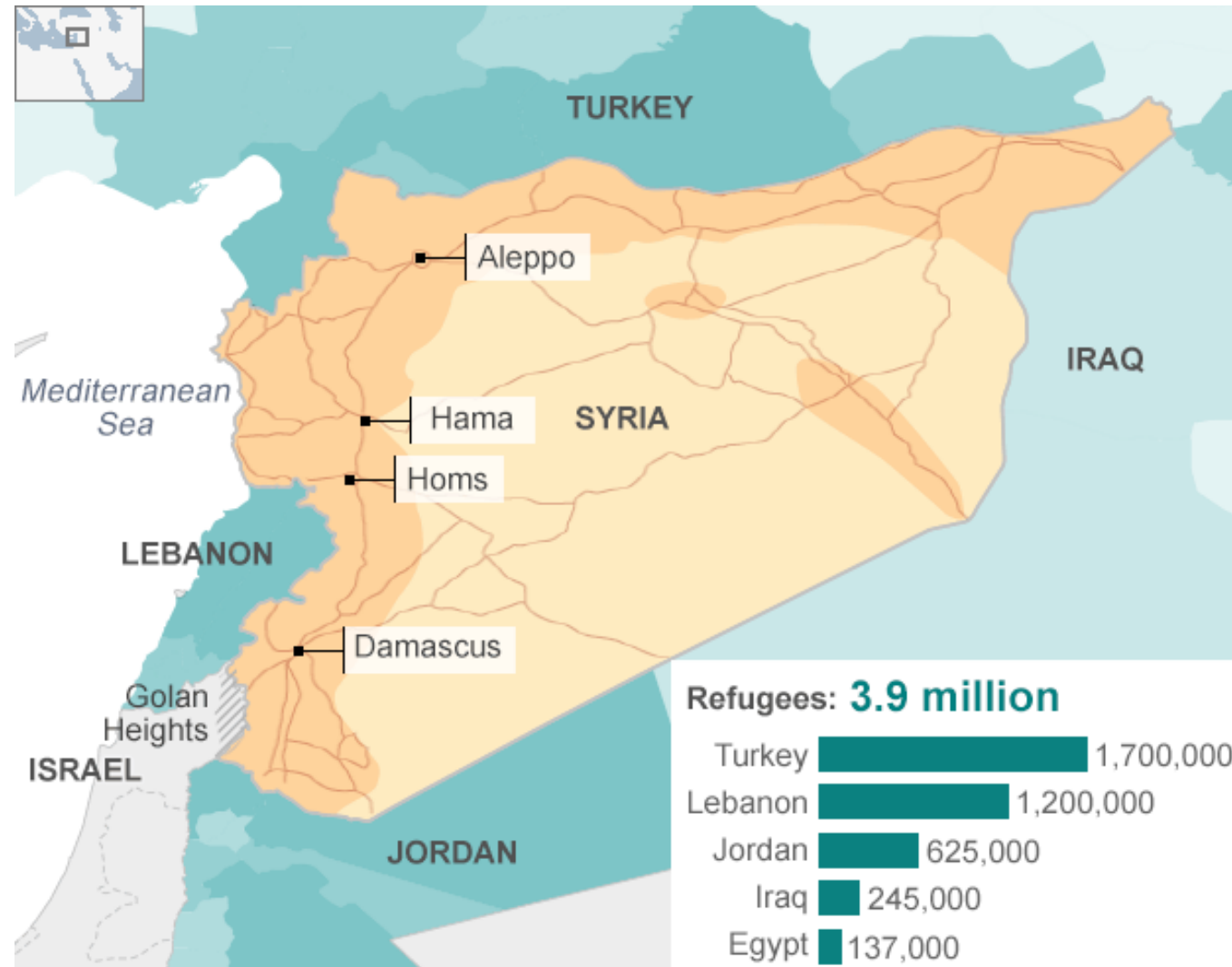


# Children in Aleppo









Conflict areas      Refugees: 5,000 +   15,000 +   45,000 +   135,000+

Source: UNHCR, Reliefweb (Figures up to 12 March 2015)





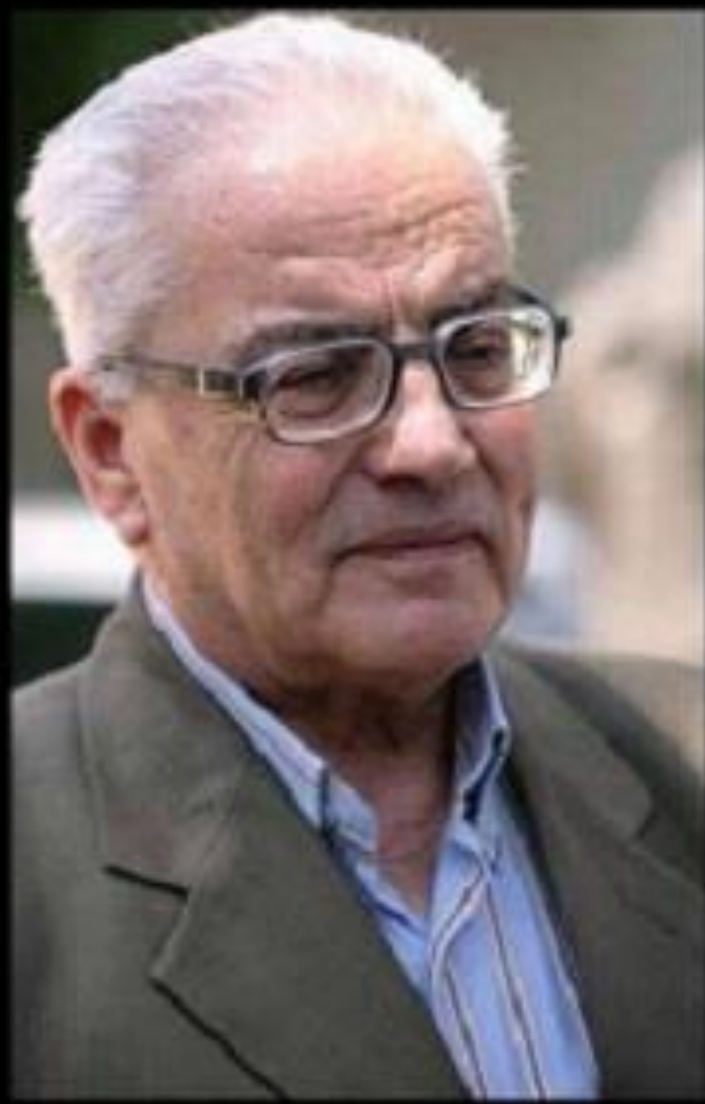
The Caliph  
Al-Baghdadi





# Islamic State

- The events that took place in eastern Syria in 2014-2015 surprised the whole world.
- The Islamic State organization (ISIS) steals, kills, deports Christians, Shiites and even Sunnis.
- Jihadists, jihadist children and women who put themselves sexually at the service of the jihadists.
- ISIS aspires to shape a new Islam, different from the known Islamic tradition and the outside world in general.
- This savagery finds a favorable context among the new generations in Syria and Iraq who have lived in poverty in recent decades.





# HUMANITARIAN CRISIS





# MY FAMILY 2015

---

My sisters were threatened everyday, their daughters risked to be abused or killed by terrorists. They saw everyday dead on the road.

---

They decided to go to Lebanon till the situation gets quieter.

Nothing happened.

---

They traveled legally to Turkey. They couldn't get any visa because of the chaos.







It was safer than living in Syria

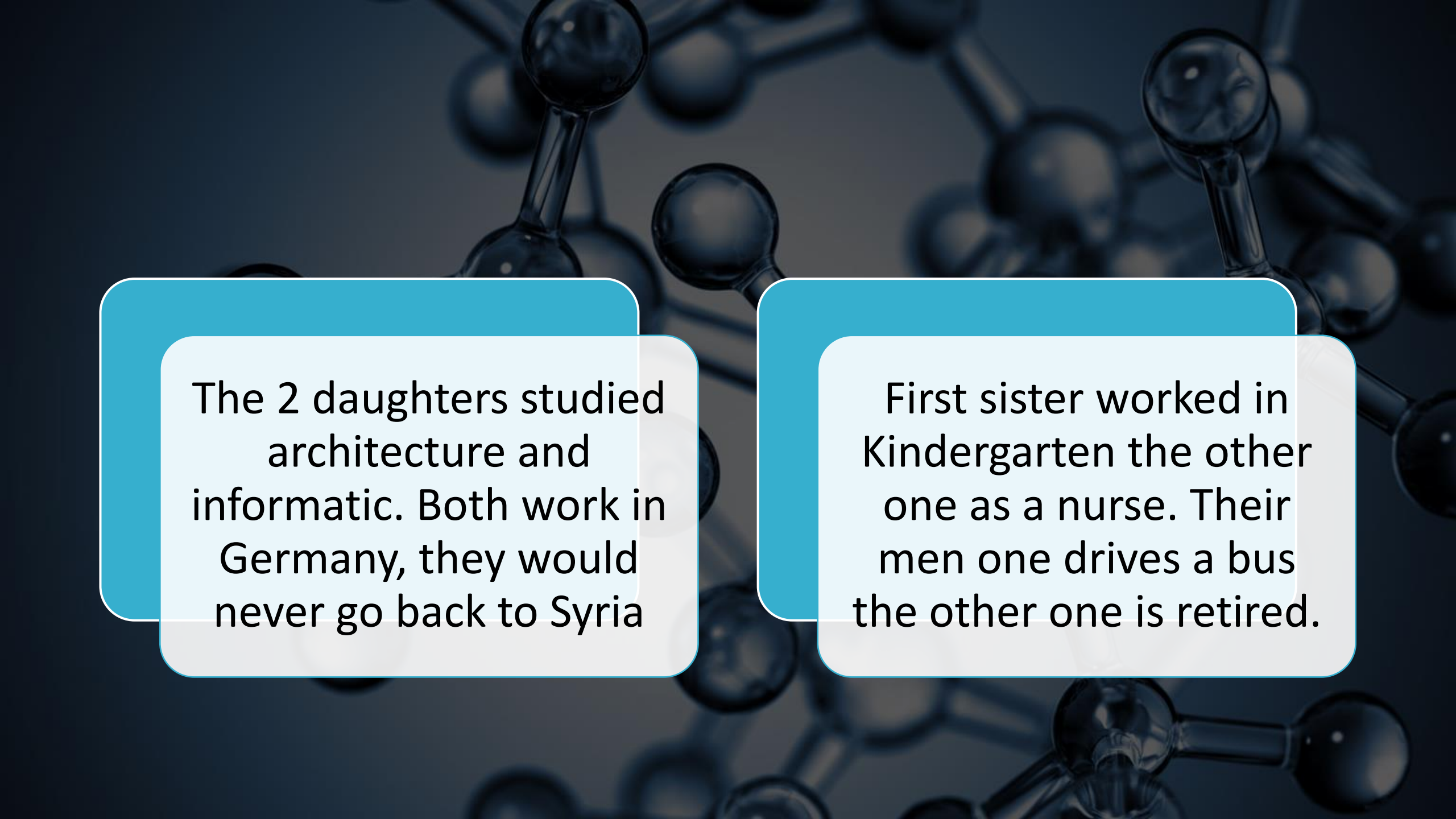


- They paid the marine traffic band to get to Greece
- 7 hours in the middle of the sea and nobody came to rescue them.
- The next day they bought again the rescue clothing, but they threw them in the sea before the departure for Greece.
- The boat was made for 10 pers. they were 50.
- From the shore to the first city 3 hours in a truck for 10 pers. They risked suffocation.
- Arrived in Vienna and the next day to Germany.
- 6 months in required asylum building, the girls wept everyday
- Finally, they got an independent accommodation and started to learn the language.



# By boat, train, bus, car, and foot through seven countries





The 2 daughters studied architecture and informatic. Both work in Germany, they would never go back to Syria

First sister worked in Kindergarten the other one as a nurse. Their men one drives a bus the other one is retired.



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# Ludwig-Steil-Hof bietet Einstiegssprachkurse für Flüchtlinge an Deutsch-Schüler hoch motiviert



Auch der Ludwig-Steil-Hof hier in Espelkamp bietet Sprachkurse für Flüchtlinge an. In zwei Kursen lernen etwa 30 Syrer, Eritreer, Iraner und Iraker an fünf Tagen pro Woche. In vier Unterrichtsstunden gemeinsam Deutsch, insgesamt gut 300 Stunden.

Die Teilnehmer sind zwischen 19 und 63 Jahren alt. Unterrichtet werden sie von drei Lehrerinnen.

hat bereits als Deutschlehrerin an der Bischof-Hermann-Kunst-Schule langjährige Erfahrungen gesammelt. B. A. Pädagogin Corinna Griepentrost unterrichtet auch in Sprachkursen der Volkshochschule Lübbecke Land.

Sie alle loben den Fleiß und das

ausländischen Schüler. „Ich werde oft gefragt, ob die Frauen keine Probleme mit den männlichen Schülern haben“, erklärt Bereichsleiterin Marion Fricke, die gemeinsam mit einem Kollegen auch für diesen Unterricht zuständig ist. „Das war hier noch nie der Fall.“

Diese Einstiegssprachkurse, von denen einer bereits erfolgreich beendet ist, werden von der Bundesagentur für Arbeit finanziert. Die Teilnahme ist freiwillig und die Schüler sind hoch motiviert, so dass auch ihre Lehrerinnen selber sehr viel Spaß am Unterricht haben. Die Kooperationspartner Volkshochschule Lübbecke Land, Diakonie und Ludwig-Steil-Hof bieten zudem einen, vom Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge finanzierten, Jugendintegrationskurs im Ludwig-Steil-Hof an.

Das Foto zeigt, wie unter Anleitung von Lydia Neuberger (l.) Flüchtlinge aus Syrien, Eritree, Iran und Irak am Ludwig-Steil-Hof differenzierten Deutschunterricht in zwei Einstiegskursen

Syrians in Germany

**Suche Kumpeln für z.B. Unternehmungen** und mit Interesse an Radtouren. Personen zwischen 20 und 30 Jahren dürfen sich

aus der Re  
für viele  
immer wi  
Die histor  
der Privat  
Gang ges  
tigt werde  
Das Re  
Transparen  
wertige F  
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**VHS: A  
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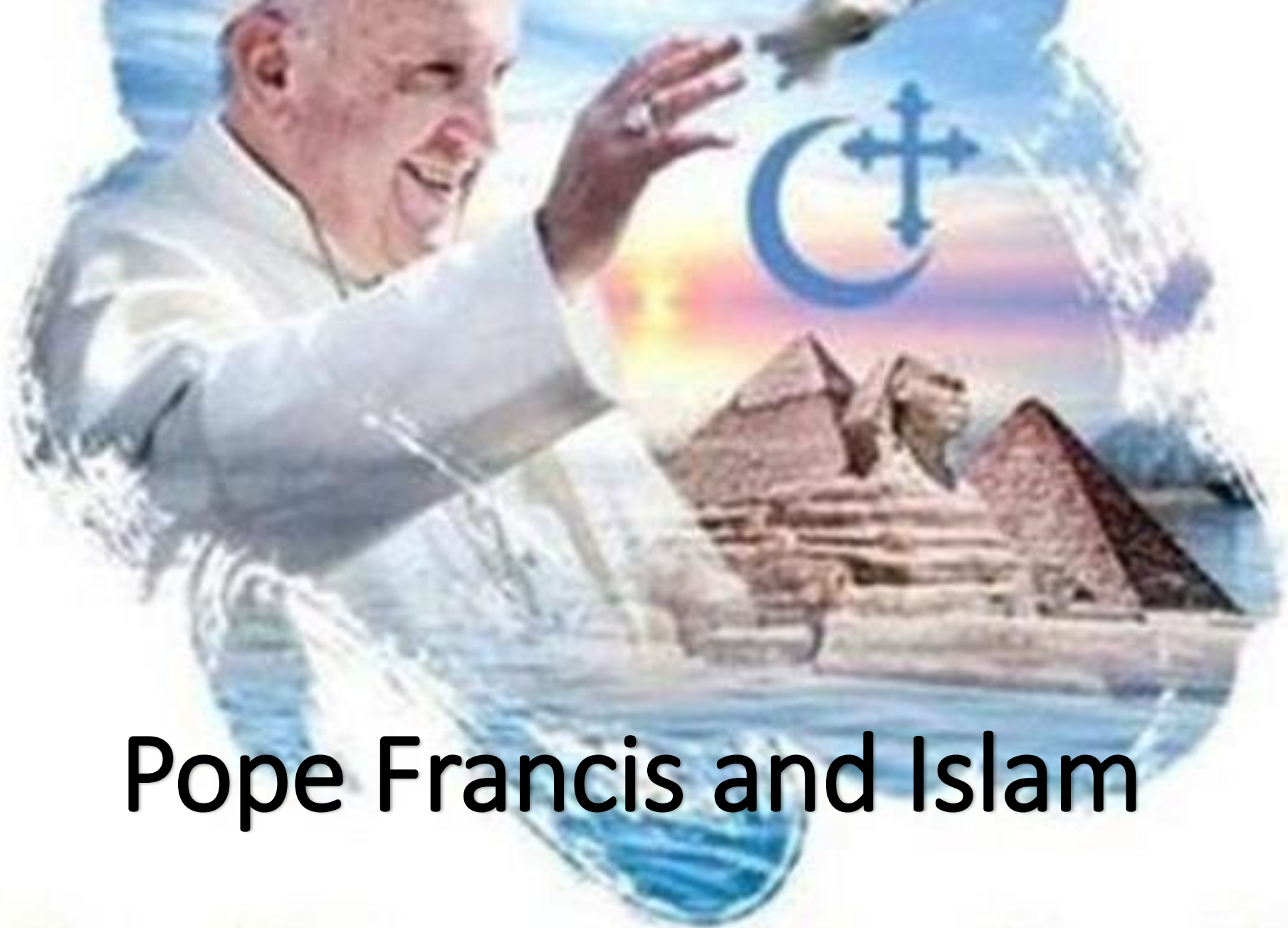
syria and Russia



# Perspectives for the Middle East

Secularism guarantees the equality of all citizens before the state and regulates the relationship between religions

Secularism is the way to overcome the barbarity of terrorism, ideological Islam and animosity towards modernity through a spiritual Islam that accepts modernity.



## Pope Francis and Islam

بابا السلام في مصر السلام





Francis and Tayyeb