

A photograph of a busy street in Damascus, Syria. In the background, a large, light-colored domed building, likely a mosque, is visible under a clear sky. The street is filled with people, including a woman in the foreground carrying a child on her shoulders. A striped umbrella is visible on the right side of the frame. The overall atmosphere is one of a bustling, everyday scene in a city.

Stephen Glain  
Dreaming of  
Damascus

Arab Voices from a  
Region in Turmoil

A thousand years ago, a vast Arab empire stretched from the Asian steppe across the Mediterranean to Spain, pioneering new technologies, sciences, art and culture. Arab traders and Arab currencies dominated the global economy the way Western multinationals and the dollar do today.

A thousand years later, Arab states are in decay. Official corruption and ineptitude have eroded state authority and created a vacuum that militant Islam – with its schools, hospitals and other civic services – has rushed to fill. In *Dreaming of Damascus*, Stephen Glain distills his experience as *The Wall Street Journal's* Middle East correspondent into a poignant and intimate account of how the Arab world – once the spearhead of what we call globalization – may collapse in the absence of badly needed reform. Glain takes us on a journey through the heart of what were once the great Islamic caliphates, the countries now known as Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Israel/Palestine, Iraq and Egypt, to illustrate how a once prosperous and enlightened civilization finds itself at a crossroad between Dark Age and New Dawn.

As late as a century ago, what we call the Levant was a prosperous trading bloc. By carving the region into proxy states and emirates after the First World War, the Western powers Balkanized and undermined the Levantine economy. That in turn prepared the ground for a regional autocracy that rejected economic openness and religious tolerance, qualities that had made the old Islamic caliphates great. Today the Arab world has opted out of the global economy, with tragic consequences. It is up to the new generation of leaders – and the Western governments that created the modern Middle East – to reverse the sclerosis and revive the region.

DREAMING OF  
DAMASCUS

# DREAMING OF DAMASCUS

*Arab Voices from a Region in Turmoil*

Stephen Glain



JOHN MURRAY  
*Albemarle Street, London*

# 1177

© Stephen Glain 2003

First published in 2003  
by John Murray (Publishers) Ltd,  
50 Albemarle Street, London W1S 4BD

The moral right of the author has been asserted

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any material form (including photocopying or storing it in any medium by electronic means and whether or not transiently or incidentally to some other use of this publication) without the written permission of the copyright owner, except in accordance with the provision of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 or under the terms of a licence issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, 90 Tottenham Court Road, London W1T 4LP. Applications for the copyright owner's written permission to reproduce any part of this publication should be addressed to the publisher.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0-7195-5543 4

Typeset in Monotype Bembo 12/13.5  
by Servis Filmsetting Ltd, Manchester

Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

90-52  
GLA

*For my parents.*

*And for Danny.*

'How dull it is to pause, to make an end,  
To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use.'

Tennyson, *Ulysses*

# Contents

<i>Illustrations</i>	ix
<i>Maps</i>	x
Introduction	1
1. Lebanon: The Sluice Gate	22
2. Syria: The Circle	58
3. Jordan: The Royal Expediency	105
4. Palestine: The Last Colony	136
5. Iraq: The Show	177
6. Egypt: The Towering Dwarf	212
Conclusion: Whither <i>Asabiyya</i> ?	257
<i>Chronology</i>	274
<i>Sources</i>	280
<i>Bibliography</i>	285
<i>Glossary</i>	290
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	292
<i>Index</i>	297