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"Syria, the cradle of civilization and the gateway to history."

Ph : 248-519-2496

Fax: 248-519-2399

Email: News@SyrianConsulate.org

Website: SyrianConsulate.org

On the Road to Damascus



In June of 2007, Pope Benedict XVI declared a jubilee year in honor of the two-thousandth anniversary of the birth of Saint Paul. The jubilee year will run from June 28, 2008, through June 20, 2009. In its turn Syria has launched a celebration in honor of Saint Paul, who converted to Christianity on the road to Damascus and helped spread the new religion to the non-Jewish world. A mass was attended by both Christians and Muslims in Damascus, with other events being organized over the next 12 months with the help of the tourism ministry. The Melkite Greek Catholic Church will organize conferences, exhibitions and other cultural events. Paul was born in Tarsus, in what is now Turkey, somewhere around seven to 10 AD. He died in Rome, where he was beheaded on the orders of the Emperor Nero. In the New Testament, the Acts of the Apostles recount how Paul, born as Saul, was traveling to Damascus from Jerusalem with letters authorizing him to persecute Christians there. The Bible says he was surrounded by a bright light which caused him to fall from his horse, blinded. A voice from Heaven, believed to be that of Jesus, said "Saul, Saul, why persecute thou me?" "It was from that experience that Saul converted to Christianity, being baptized a few days later in Damascus after he recovered his sight. In an allusion to Paul's experience, dramatic conversions to Christianity are often called a Damascene experience.

eNewsletter Quiz? Sponsored by OMNIAT Telecom



Ebla is an ancient city located in north Syria. It was discovered in 1973 by an Italian archaeological expedition from the University of Rome. Most importantly, nearly 20,000 cuneiform tablets were discovered in the palace archives. The tablets date from the middle of the 3rd millennium and are written in Eblaite, a Semitic dialect, as well as in Sumerian. The tablets relate mostly to economic matters, showing that Ebla was a major commercial center trading mostly in textiles, wood, and finished metals. Its influence rivaled that of Egypt and Mesopotamia, stretching from the Sinai peninsula to the Mesopotamian highlands. The documents have been taken to imply that Ebla had as many as 200,000 inhabitants and a government that was administered by 12,000 officials!

What is the meaning of the name Ebla? Send your answer to quiz@SyrianConsulate.org to enter a drawing to win a \$100 calling card to Syria (or any other country) from OMNIAT Telecom.

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