The Frankish acquisition of territory during the First Crusade and subsequent years unquestionably marks an important turning-point in the history of the Middle East. The Crusaders transplanted legal, administrative, ethical and cultural models and principles into alien surroundings, which had hitherto been characterised by quite other structural elements and mentalities. Nevertheless, the formation of the Crusader states did not lead to a revolutionary change in the structure of Syria and northern Mesopotamia (al-Jazira) for two reasons. Firstly, the wave which founded Frankish lordships and states did not take place in a polity unified legally, ethnically or confessionally, but in an area of extreme diversity. It was to be of crucial significance for the history of the Frankish states that leaders of Turkish origin took power in the great cities of Syria and northern Mesopotamia during the three decades preceding the First Crusade. None of those petty Turkish lordships was capable of sustaining the role of a major power for long, in contrast to the previous period where the Byzantine Empire and Egypt had played this role. In lieu of this, there developed a system of Syrian states (or autonomous lordships), which was marked by the interest of the separate rulers in maintaining their power. This system functioned through the particular structure of rivalries and alliances, which had become well entrenched and which also continued to exist after 1098–99. Secondly, the formation of the Frankish lordships resembled that of their Turkish counterparts in that they were not accompanied by a widespread movement of colonization. In the countryside, neither Turks nor Franks altered the structure of settlement and organization of the land to any significant extent, while occasionally altering them in the towns to various degrees.

The establishment of the Franks in the Middle East thus did not entail a complete reorganization of the region, but for the most part took place within existing structures, as with the Turks. The characteristics of the pre-existing Syrian system of autonomous lordships were crucial for the inter-state relations that developed after 1098–99. The present work therefore does not begin with the year 1098, 1099 or 1100, but includes the last
three decades of the eleventh century. The following two sections will highlight the development of the Syrian system of autonomous lordships with its special characteristics as well as the policy of the Crusaders in regard to alliances and treaties up to 1099 and a consideration of their motives. The resultant findings will be of fundamental significance for understanding Frankish-Muslim relations in Syria after the acquisition of territories by the Crusaders.

**The System of Autonomous Lordships before the First Crusade (c. 1070–1099)**

In the introduction to his translation of the chronicle of Ibn al-Qalanisi, Gibb distinguishes the six different powers which competed for lordship and territory directly before the coming of the First Crusade.¹ He identifies long-established rulers, i.e. (1) the Shiite Fatimid dynasty, which had ruled Egypt since 969 and (2) local amirs, judges *(qadis)* and tribal shaykhs of Arab descent. These were distinct from groups of recent arrivals in Syria, most importantly (3) the Seljuk princes from Mesopotamia, which had been under Seljuk control from 1055, who started to penetrate Syria, (4) the Turkish amirs coming to Syria as tribal chiefs or Seljuk governors and seeking to establish or extend autonomous rule and (5) independent Turcoman tribes, who came to Syria in the last third of the eleventh century in the course of the Turkish migration westwards.² Finally, the sixth power was the rural, urban and nomadic population of Syria itself, having greater or less political capacity. In towns, this population was organized in the corporations, the militia *(ahdath)* and the magistrates, who participated in the newly awakened urban autonomy movement.³ In the countryside, the population was organized in tribes and self-contained confessional communities. This variety of antagonistic actors stands at the end of a process marked by the regionalization and particularization of the conditions of lordship in the Middle East.

The traditional partition of Syria into an Egyptian-dominated and a Byzantine-dominated sphere had come to an end during the 1060s in consequence of the struggle for power within Egypt and the weakness

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¹ Gibb, *Damascus Chronicle*, 14–32.
² Cahen, *Pénétration*.