

# Little Known City of Historical Significance

## OLDEST ROMANS ABSORB THE NATIVE RELIGIONS

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columns still stand. The great doors are superb in their tracery. There are lizzards, birds, satyrs and what-nots, scarcely more than an inch in size but exquisitely carved and mingled with a running decoration of vine-stems and leaves in which veins are shown with microscopic accuracy.

### Acropolis Becomes Citadel

The second impression which lingers was the existence everywhere of the contrast between the Arabs who conquered Baalbek in 634 A.D. and the Romans who had done the magnificent building in the earlier centuries. The Arabs utilized the Acropolis as a citadel. They built up its outer walls with smaller stones which still disfigure the sky-line. Other beautifully carved stones they chiselled down into catapult balls to throw out on their beseiging enemies. Great heaps of these catapult balls may still be seen in the court of the acropolis. They hacked away at the base of pillars of the Temple of Bacchus so as to extract the brass joining rods. They had no respect at all for art nor for religion. They were vandals to the core.

The present day descendants of these desecraters of the seventh century show little improvement in their attitude, for no less than two years before our visit, during the Druses rebellion, bandits had swept into the town, burned the governor's house and taken Professor Alouf's son for ransom out into the desert. The Professor showed us evidences of the raid in the hotel and with tears flowing in true oriental fashion, he opened the empty cabinets in his little museum, crudely built amid the massive ruins, and told us that the vandals had taken and mashed before his eyes the precious bits of ancient findings that had represented the interest and labors of a life-time.

But my third impression is the one that grew the deepest and of which I shall have the most to say. It was the impression of the massiveness of these ancient structures. One visitor describes them as "grandiose . . . exaggerated, boastful and laboriously huge as though the older Roman chastity of strong and simple line had been forgotten and ambition for bigness had usurped its place."

### Famous Pillars Still Stand

The first touch of hugeness to which our attention was called was to the eleven steps on which we ascended to the floor of the great temple of Jupiter. These eleven steps with ten-inch risers were cut in one piece 20 feet long in sections. Imagine the tonnage of each stone. The crowning feature of the whole Acropolis is the six remaining pillars of the Temple of Jupiter, over sixty feet in height, made of but three sections apiece and crowned with the most elaborate Corinthian capitals. For miles around in the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon mountains these six huge pillars with their entablement stand out in their stark grandeur.

More wonderful still are the remains of the red granite pillars. There were originally one hundred and forty-four of these. They had been brought in the rough as monoliths from Assuam in Egypt, weighing 80 tons apiece. Think what this meant, conveying 144 stones of such weight 500 miles down the Nile, then 200 miles up the sea coast of Palestine, then 70 miles over the Lebanon mountains, 7,000 feet above the sea level. I said to the professor:

"Why did they go to all that trouble when there was such a wealth of stone in the Baalbek quarries?"

He answered that the architects needed a color contrast in the portico

of the great court and then added "these old Roman builders stopped at nothing."

And if one doubted that last statement of the curator's his doubts were dispelled when he was taken to see the so-called "trilithon," the name commonly given to the course of three cyclopean blocks that are found in the great rampart wall on the north-west side of the Acropolis. These are possibly the largest stones ever used in architecture. The stones average about sixty-two by fourteen by eleven feet and weigh approximately 900 tons apiece, and remember that their joints are so accurate that it is impossible to insert the blade of a knife between them. Each of these blocks has in it enough stone to build a building sixty feet square, and forty feet high, with walls one foot thick, considerably more than the stone needed to build the Wilmette Baptist church.

The archeologists tell us that this great wall of fortification was the last of the Roman enterprises in Baalbek and they have ample evidence for their

claim. We saw the evidence. In the afternoon of the second of our three delightful days in Baalbek, we were driven about three quarters of a mile out to the site of the ancient quarry from which all this mass of limestone was taken, and there before our eyes was the last of these huge blocks, not quite separated from the mother rock, and measuring sixty-nine feet, by sixteen, by fourteen feet, and weighing 1200 tons, containing enough stone to build two Wilmette Baptist churches.

### "How Did They Move Stones?"

The question that was, of course, constantly calling for answer was "How did they ever move these huge stones?" The pit of the quarry was higher than the level of the course in which these mighty blocks were laid so that at least they did not need to be elevated—but even then one's imagination staggers as it seeks to draw the picture. One thing is certain. Hadrian was the most systematic and determined of all the persecutors of the Christians. It is safe to say that it was Christian artists who wrought

the elegant tracery of these stones and it was Christian slaves on whose backs they were carried. Tradition tells us how they died by hundreds every day and how the market was supplied by daily caravan loads just as other "raw material" was furnished.

But one's Christian heart leaps and sings when he is shown at Baalbek, right in the midst of the great court of the Acropolis, the remains of a huge Christian church built there in the time of Constantine. The tide had turned and a faith had been espoused by Rome whose genius was to enslave no man but make all people free to know and do the truth.

Our little guide at Baalbek was an interesting chap. He talked English fluently. As we stood on a high parapet of the Acropolis looking down the valley, with the mighty snow-capped Lebanons rising off to the West, I said to him, "Why does not this Syrian nation amount to more? You have such a wonderful country and wonderful history." He answered, "We have not enough people here."

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