

THE BEKAA VALLEY

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‘ANJAR AND EARLY ISLAMIC LEBANON— CONTINUITY OR CHANGE?

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The city of ‘Anjar is an unique testimony to a period of transformation and to a dynasty in quest of a style that would represent the newly-founded Islamic society. The blend of contrasting traits such as a regular layout reminiscent of the palace-cities of ancient times with the incorporation of a mosque, attest the interplay between the classic tradition and the requirements of the spread of Islam. The origins of ‘Anjar have given rise to debates. While some Syriac graffiti date it to 714, a Syriac chronicle identifies caliph al-Walid I (705–15), the sixth Caliph of the Umayyad dynasty as the patron of the town. Umayyad roots were also given to the town by Jean Sauvaget, Maurice Chehab, and other scholars. The first caliphate in the Middle East after the Arab conquest was founded by the Umayyads who ruled for 90 years, between 661 and 750, before they were overthrown by the Abbasids in 749–50.

The Umayyads placed the capital of their empire at Damascus (Dimashq). However, few resided there permanently, thus an array of settlements was established on the edges of the Syrian dessert. Their purpose seems to have been places of refuge for the Umayyad princes during some periods of the year, yet the case of ‘Anjar eludes any clear-cut statement. Its mix of traits leaves room for several interpretations. Its scale and the fortified walls would point towards a stronghold in times of adversity; its location in marshy terrain would make it a suitable hunting lodge or garrison point, whereas its layout would recommend it as an administrative, commercial and economic centre. Nevertheless, what does seem clear is that ‘Anjar had some strategic positioning, being placed at equal distances from the capital (Damascus) and the nearest port to reach (Beirut); ‘Anjar controlled the strip of the Biqa plain laying between the Lebanon and the anti-Lebanon ranges.

‘Anjar is a classical example of Umayyad architecture and city-planning, all the more intriguing considering the fact that it was built and abandoned in a period of less than forty years. Excavations at the site were headed by Maurice Chehab from 1953 and his endeavours have revealed much of what is currently known about ‘Anjar. Previous references belong to Sauvaget, who noticed the Umayyad character of the ruins, but seeing their condition, he wrote the following: “Everything is in a state of advanced decay: the towers are so ruined that it is impossible to discern their original form; the rampart itself has lost almost all of its facing, and the doors are identifiable only by the breaches in the wall. Finally, the interior of the enclosure has been completely levelled and devastated...there is nothing left but a ploughed field.”

The sides of the enclosure span a length of 370 m from north to south, and 310 m from east to west, makes up an enclosed area of 114 000 square meters. The exterior stone walls are 2 meters thick,

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with 8 semi cylindrical towers on the north and south sides and 10 on the east and west sides, all half-round, with the exception of the ones on the corners. Each of the 4 walls is broken at the middle by a 3.08 m door, flanked by two solid, nearly semicircular towers. Two colonnaded streets, Decumanus Maximus running from north to south and Cardo Maximus (Fig. 1) from west to east, both flanked by shops, link the four doors and split the enclosure into four quadrants. The considerable width of 20 meters of the two streets reveals a tendency towards spacious environments, a trait descended from Roman architecture, in contrast to the narrow streets that will become a distinctive trait of the Arab architecture. At the cross-roads of Cardo and Decumanus, there is a classical tetrapylon of four groups of four columns, another distinctive trait reminiscent of Roman style (Fig. 2). On the west side of the Cardo the number of shops was established at 32, and overall one can count at least 114 shops. This raises a series of questions as to who might have been the potential customers or whether ‘Anjar was a market town or a *caravanserai*.



Fig. 1: Cardo Maximus - View from the South Gate.

Each of the four quadrants seems to have had a different purpose: 1. the east side of the town reserved for the officials, consisted of two palaces and one mosque. 2. the west side accommodating the inhabitants, contained a lodging area, a bath complex and other two courtyard buildings. 3. two rectangular enclosures with unknown functions. Roughly, the quadrants comprised of the following: south-east: a

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mosque and a *dar al-imara*, which was a royal or gubernatorial palace (Fig. 3); south-west: the main area of living; north-west: a bath complex and two rectangular empty enclosures of an unknown function and north-west: a second palace and a mosque. A highly visible peculiarity of this arrangement is that the housing area and the area for the official and religious functions were restricted each into a single quadrant: south-west for accommodation and especially south-east for the mosque and largest of the two palaces.

The architecture of ‘Anjar is more of a puzzle than a source of solid answers. Analyzing it raises questions as to what it could be considered (village, city or urban centre, Umayyad



Photo: Mihail Mitrea

Fig. 2: Tetrapylon



Photo: Mihail Mitrea

Fig. 3: Arcades of the Great Palace

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country residence, late Roman *colonia*) and what its designed purpose was (a hunting lodge, a place of refuge, a possible garrison). Its particular blend of classic city planning (symmetry and regularity, noticed even in the street grid of the living area, wide streets) with recognizable parts of the Islamic city (a mosque, two palaces, a bath and a bazar) speaks of Roman models tailored to Islamic requirements, with the balance tilted rather towards the former. Evidence of a period in which “the hand of Rome still lay heavily on the architecture of the Near East,” ‘Anjar was not yet at the level of a classic Arab city.

Was this blend a successful experiment? Evidence shows that ‘Anjar was abandoned unfinished, the reasons advanced for this being the death of al-Walid I and a weak interest from the part of the inhabitants. Furthermore, the way in which the Islamic city later developed shows a clear departure from the classic model. But, even though short-lived, the experiment of ‘Anjar remains valuable in its rendering of a period in which classical and Islamic ideals were groping for a common solution to urban settlement.

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THE SANCTUARY SITE OF HOSN NIHA

BY EVA MORTENSEN

The Sanctuary Site of Hosn Niha

The sanctuary site of Hosn Niha (fig. 1) is situated a little northwest of Niha in a height of approximately 1.350 meters. The stream that runs from Hosn Niha to Niha some of the way flows along the modern road connecting the two sites. The sanctuary lies on a polygonal platform which is supported by retaining walls on the sloping west- and south sides, while the northern boundary of the sanctuary is limited by the steep rising rock. To the east the terrain is more obliging and the entrance to the sanctuary was probably located here. Beneath the sanctuary lies the much damaged ruins of a Roman village (fig. 2) and near this, on the opposite side of the ravine, a two-parted shrine has been identified. It consists of two rooms and in front of these are two altars.

There are three recognisable phases on the polygonal platform and ceramic shows that the place was in use from the 1st to the 7th century AD.



Fig. 1: Plan of the site. The first phase is indicated in green, the second in red and the third in purple.



Fig. 2: Standing in the western end of the cella of the great temple A you can see the scarce remains of the Roman village.

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Phase 1

It seems that the sanctuary grew up around a spring. The first phase of the sanctuary included a “well house” (E), a little ante temple (D) and a rectangular structure (H) (fig 3). The well is covered by big stone slabs and the round hole made it possible to get water from here. The temple is oriented roughly south and has two columns *in antis* (fig. 4) and a cella with two niches – a smaller one in the east wall and a bigger one for the cult image in the back wall. The block on top of the niche is protruding and therefore indicating a half domed aedicula roof. There has not been found any fragments from the ceiling and the roof but it seems that the cella was



Photo: Eva Mortensen

Fig. 3: Three buildings from phase 1, structure H, the “well house” and the ante temple.



Photo: Eva Mortensen

Fig. 4: It is possible to see the position of the columns in the pronaos floor. The stone slabs covering the floor has a small step cut into it – in two places though the step is not cut through.



Photo: Eva Mortensen

Fig. 5: The cella of the ante temple. In the back wall the big niche for the cult image is visible, and in the upper corner it is possible to see the beginning of the vault.

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covered by a vault (fig. 5) – which is still visible in the north-eastern corner. Presumably there was an altar in front of the ante temple and behind the temple structure H functioned as a place of service for the cult. This first phase belongs to the 1st century AD and corresponds with the coming and settling of the Romans. Also the two-parted shrine has been associated with this phase.

It might have been Atargatis whom was worshipped in the ante temple. This has been suggested because of an inscription (*IGLS VI 2947*) naming a sculptor, Hotarion – Hotarion is the theophore of Atargatis (theophore meaning a name, which embeds the name of a god).

Phase 2

In the 2nd and 3rd century AD the sanctuary was monumentalised, as was the trend at this time during the stable imperial power. The great temple (A) was built in the western part of the sanctuary opening to the east. Yasmine has investigated the measurements of the temple and he has concluded that the architects used the unit 32.22 cm when building the whole temple. This also shows that the temple was built in one setting and not as a monumentalisation of an already existing temple. It is a prostyle tetrastyle temple on a high podium with pronaos, cella, adyton and crypt (fig. 6). It has four prostyle Corinthian columns, unfluted and with weathered attic bases. A Corinthian ante capital can be found in the ruins. From the pronaos there are two doors that lead to the cella. A wide door in the middle and a small door in the north. The small door also leads to the spiral staircase which gave access to the roof. The middle door shows traces of



Photo: Eva Mortensen

Fig. 6: The great temple seen from the east. Only the wide middle door is visible, since the small door is behind the fallen blocks in the pronaos.

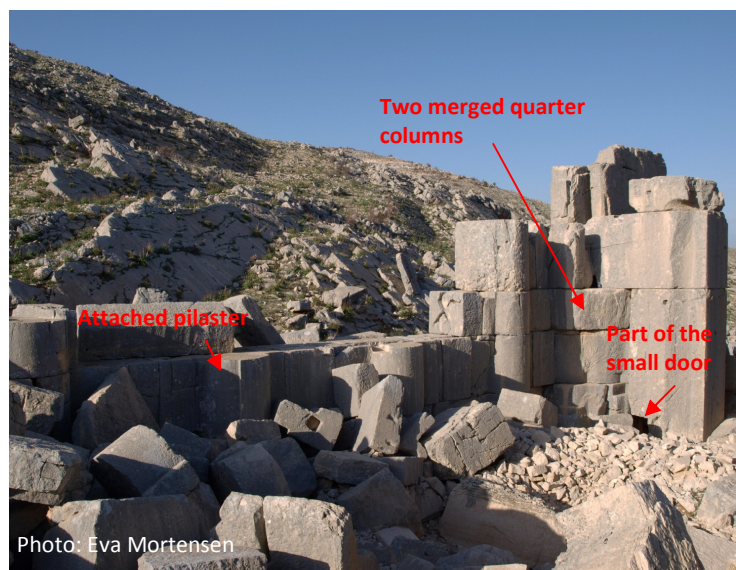


Photo: Eva Mortensen

Fig. 7: The north-eastern corner of the cella.

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grilles that could close off the temple even though the doors were open. In the cella treasure hunters have rummaged through the ruins and damaged these. Along each cella wall there are four half columns and in each corner there are two merged quarter columns. Both half- and quarter columns have Ionic capitals and attic bases – the attic bases runs all along the walls. On the third pair of half columns from the door there is a pilaster attached (fig. 7). Krencker and Zschietzschmann reconstruct these columns as supports for the adyton's baldachin. Furthermore they reconstruct the adyton as divided in three parts which can be seen at several places in the Roman temples of Lebanon (e.g. Baalbek's "Bacchus temple" and Niha's temple A). The middle part was occupied by the cult image, a staircase led to a room in the southern part and a door in the northern part was the entrance to the crypt underneath the adyton. The temple looks very unfinished. The walls are not smooth and many of the ornamentation bands are left in bosses (both outside and inside). Even though we are in a rather distant village they have put much manpower into this project and they used very big blocks. An example is the 8.30 m long block on the western outer side of the cella.

Also belonging to this phase of the sanctuary are the cult service buildings F and G. Structure G probably served the great temple while structure F might have had two functions (because of the two different levels of the building). The lower levelled room might have been to service the court of the ante temple while the upper levelled enclosure was a terrace for banqueting (fig. 8).

The so-called colonnaded monument also dates to this phase. The square monolith with four niches that made up the central part of the monument has presumably survived as a reused element in the later basilica (B) (we were not able to find it though). Krencker and Zschietzschmann have reconstructed it together with a fragment of a coffered roof and if this reconstruction is right it is very similar to some of the other colonnaded monuments you can find in Lebanon (e.g. in Qalaat Faqra and Qsarnaba (fig. 9)). Could this then have been the altar of the great temple since the similar looking structure in Qsarnaba probably served as an altar? On the monolith is an inscription (IGLS VI 2946) naming the local god Mifsenus along

IGLS VI 2946

"ex usu et reditu obligatorum dei Mifseni et vici et cultoribus eius sub cura Haninae et Sacerdot(is) et Zabdae et Candidi et Anni vet(erani)(?) et Magni et Samaionis et Zebidae et Bel(i)abi".

"With the revenues of the land belonging to Mifsenus and the village, also on the contributions of the devotees of the god under the vigilance of Haninas, of Saerdos, of Zabdas, of Candidus, of Annius the veteran, of Magnus, of Samaion, of Zebidas, and Beliabos, this monument was made".

with nine benefactors (with both Roman and Semitic names). These benefactors as well as the income from the land that Mifsenus owned paid for the monument. It has been suggested that the ancient

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name of the village was Mifsa which connects well with the worship of Mifsenus – probably in the great temple.

Phase 3

We do not know much of what took place during the 4th and 5th century AD but from seismic investigations we know that the earthquake destroying Beirut in 551 AD presumably caused the ruin of the great temple A. Many blocks from the temple was reused in the basilica which was built here in the 3rd phase in the end of the 6th century AD. Ceramic shows that the site was left in the 7th century AD.

The basilica is built in the forecourt of the great temple and thereby hiding the place of the temples altar. It has its entrance on the westside. The basilica, which is much destroyed, has a wide middle nave and two narrower aisles. The northern aisle does not have parallel walls since its northern wall is constructed so that it uses structure H's wall as the foundation. There

was a passage between the nave and aisles via two door-openings in each wall. The middle nave ends in the apse, while the northern and southern aisles end in a baptistery (C) and sacristy respectively. In the 1930's, when Krencker and Zschietzschmann visited the site the baptistery had a preserved font that had been sunken half a meter into the ground and a mosaic floor with a scale pattern and a vine in grey, black and red colours. None of these, however, are visible anymore.

A stream runs near the site – the stream only carries water from spring until midsummer when the snow in the mountains melts. Being subterranean until it reaches Hosn Niha, it gushes out here and con-



Fig. 8: Structure F seen from the northeast.



Fig. 9: Qsarnaba. Temple and colonnaded monument in front.

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tinues to Niha. As we have seen, this stream played an important role in the origin of the sanctuary (the “well house”). It kept being an important factor and it has been suggested that it played the leading part in the cult rituals. From the roof of temple A in Hosn Niha the arrival of the water in the stream could be signalled to the people in Niha. Thereafter a procession could have followed the stream to Niha passing various sacred places on their way - thereby creating a sacred route in the landscape. A further indication of this stream ritual is the placement of the two small sanctuaries (the ante temple and the two-parted shrine) on each side of the ravine in the 1st phase.

It is not possible though, to see Niha from Hosn Niha (fig. 10) so they must have had a “middle man” for the signal to reach Niha.



Fig. 10: The modern road connecting Niha and Hosn Niha. It is not possible to see from one sanctuary to the other.

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THE HISTORY OF BAALBEK/HELIOPOLIS AND ITS 'ACROPOLIS'

BY KRISHNA MARIA OLSEN

Baalbek is located in a region of very fertile land and its vicinity provides an abundance of water because of the mountain springs Orontes and Leontes. There are two water resources and a water line, called Dschudsch, in the area which provides water to Baalbek. The earliest evidence of human occupation here is suggested by a tell (an artificial mound which is a series of buried structures created by human occupation) found close to the Temple of Jupiter which could date the earliest inhabitation to the Early Bronze age (2900-2300 BC). The name Baalbek is Semitic and it is certain that it is of Canaanite origin and therefore the town must have been connected with the cult of Baal and probably served as a religious centre of the Beqaa valley. The site and its surroundings provide no early archaeological evidence other than the tell of the earliest inhabitation. However from a range of historical sources it is known that the Canaanites, Aramaeans, Assyrians, Neo-Babylonians and Persians were present here.

The name Baal comes from the weather god of the same name and is also connected to the Greek Zeus and the Roman Jupiter with aspects of Helios. The original name of Baalbek was Heliopolis, meaning the town of the sun which was named by the Ituraean tetrarchs from Chalcis in the 1st century AD. Heliopolis was central for the Iturean tetrarchs as the seat of their high priesthood which also makes the city a religious center and Jupiter was probably chosen to replace the god Baal by the tetrarchs. Some of the Roman emperors were of Syrian origin for example Septimius Severus and Caracalla so it would not have been unusual for them to worship Syrian gods under Roman names. The temples in Baalbek were dedicated to the three Roman deities: Venus, Mercury and Jupiter, the so-called triad. Though, there are ongoing discussions if there actually existed a triad.

Andreas Kropp has examined the idea of an actual triad and it seems that the iconographic evidence and ancient documents give little proof of a triad constellation of Venus, Mercury and Jupiter. They are addressed only in two fragmentary and restored dedications. But the notion of a familial triad is firmly established by many scholars. Evidence of at least eight cults have been discovered at Baalbek and these are: Baal, Jupiter-Hadad, Venus-Atargatis/Astarte, Mercury, Tyche, the sun, the muses and Sabazius, where some of these are Semitic deities. They are all apparently assimilated to the supreme sun cult. The function of Baalbek was trade and this fits well with Mercury's role as a protector of trade.

The name Baal also means god and Baalbek is located in the Beqaa valley so its name therefore means God of the Beqaa valley. In 15 BC Emperor Augustus granted Baalbek the status of belonging to the terri-

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tory of Colonia Berytos with the name Colonia Iulia Augusta Felix Berytos. The construction of the Roman temples began in the time of Augustus and were completed in the reign of Caracalla and Philip the Arab. The town finally became a Colonia in 193 AD in the time of Septimius Severus where it was declared to be Colonia Iulia Augusta Felix Heliopolis. The city was surrounded by a wall in the Roman period and this had the form of a rhombus with its sides measuring 800-1000 meters and it covered an area of over 70 hectares. There were four gates but only one escaped total destruction because a part of it was incorporated into the barracks.

When Emperor Constantine (272-337 AD) came to power he closed the pagan temples but Constantine's successor Julian the Apostate (331/332-363 AD) went back to paganism and he had the church at Baalbek destroyed and persecuted the Christians in Syria. During Theodosius I Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire in 380 AD. By now the area was Christian though Christianity did not last here for long. By 637 AD the Muslims had overtaken the area. In 1517 Baalbek became a part of the Ottoman Empire but the town was in constant decline because of the walls and columns continuously tumbling because of severe earthquakes and vandalism.

Heliopolis was a place for trading between the cities of Tripoli, Beirut and Damascus. The town must have earned a lot of money since they could afford the erection of such costly buildings like the Jupiter Heliopolitanus sanctuary. The money could have come from taxes collected from those who transported goods from the north of Syria crossing the Beqaa valley to go to the coast of Phoenicia. The city was one of the caravan stations for the traders because of the year around water supply which also made the city an agricultural center.

Near the big sanctuaries are quarries which were used to construct the buildings. There are two large limestone quarries outside the city but there is one small one south of the big sanctuary. In this quarry lies a colossal rectangular stone also known as the *Stone of the pregnant woman* and is a little bit over 21 meters long, 5 meters wide and weighs over



Fig. 1: The Stone of the pregnant woman on the quarry site.

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1000 tons (fig. 1). A second monolith, called Monolith II, was found in the 1990s weighing more than the other monolith mentioned with just 200 kilos more. Large columns of Egyptian red granite have been found in the area which suggests import. The temples at Baalbek were built in a pure stone masonry technique almost entirely without the use of mortar.

We do not know much about the "Acropolis" outside the city wall because there are almost no remains left. Just outside the city walls are the remains of a porticus with columns in the Corinthian order (fig. 2). This dates from the 3rd century AD. A big theatre lies beside the porticus but modern buildings are built above most of it. A necropolis has also been excavated with rock-cut tombs but unfortunately there are no significant finds because of robbery in early times. We also find a representation of a temple of Mercury on coins from Philip the Arab with a caduceus and a purse symbolizing the temple of Mercury as well as a wide and long staircase (fig 3). Such a staircase measuring 12-14 meters wide has been found south of the ancient city on the Scheik Abdallah which leads up to the "Acropolis" though no evidence of a temple is left on the site to prove this (figs. 4 & 5).



Photo: Krishna Olsen

Fig. 2: The Portico.



Van Ess &
Weber 1999

Fig. 3: Representation on a coin of the Temple of Mercury and the staircase on Scheik Abdallah.

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Fig. 4: What is left of the stairs leading up to the "Acropolis".



Fig. 5: A fragment of the monumental stairs.

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BAALBEK: THE SANCTUARIES OF 'BACCHUS' AND 'VENUS'

BY SIGNE BØRSEN KOCH

When visiting Baalbek, the monumental temple complex dedicated to the god Jupiter, is naturally the focal point for most visitors. However, the two minor temples placed in the vicinity of the larger complex are in many ways just as interesting both architecturally and culturally.

Baalbek or Heliopolis, placed in the Beqaa valley, at the foot of the Anti-Lebanon Mountains, was not only a stop on the caravan route going east, but also an important religious centre. The religious activity was focused around the Heliopolitan triad of Jupiter, Mercury, and Venus. The three Roman gods were introduced as a Roman counterpart to an already existing triad of Semitic gods. Several inscriptions, mainly found in the Jupiter sanctuary, confirm the presence of the triad, but its exact importance is still unknown.

Since the early excavations on the site in the early 1900's, both of the temples have been the focus of great debate. Because there is found no epigraphic material, there are many unanswered questions – not even the dedications of the temples have been fully established.

Despite the many unknown facts about the temples, they can help in the understanding of the complexity of religion in the remote regional provinces, where Roman culture clashed with the pre-existing cultures of the old population.

"The Temple of Bacchus"

The so-called "Temple of Bacchus", placed on the south side of the Jupiter Heliopolitanus Sanctuary is somewhat dwarfed by its enormous neighbour. But actually, this temple with a podium of 83 x 36 meters is in itself one of the largest surviving Roman temples. It is at the same time the best preserved Roman temple of this scale anywhere in the world.

Architecturally, the layout of the building is similar to most of the



Photo: Signe B. Koch

Fig. 1: View from the cella of "The temple of Bacchus" to the remains of the adyton entrance.

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Roman temples built in this area. In general, the building follows the prescriptions for Roman podium temples, given to us by Vitruvius. A frontal staircase leads to a pronaos with two rows of 8 Corinthian columns and 15 down each side. A grandiose and richly decorated entranceway, of almost 13 meters in height, leads to the inside, which is divided in two – the cella and the adyton. The cella walls are adorned with Corinthian half columns with two tiers of niches between. However, the construction of the adyton is built more accordingly to the eastern tradition, as seen in most of the Roman temples in this region. Stairs lead to a room formed like a canopy - a sort of temple in the temple – the holy of the holiest, where the cult image was housed.

The temple is generally believed to have been built in the last half of the 2nd century AD. This is based on an analysis of the architectural and sculptural details, which seem to fit into the Antonine period. Furthermore, the 7th century AD author John Malalas tells of the emperor Antoninus Pius building a grand temple in Baalbek – which may be this temple.

Photo: Signe B. Koch



Fig. 2: One of the relief plates supposedly showing Dionysian scenes, in their present state of preservation.

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During the Arab reign in the 13th century, the temple was incorporated into a fortress together with the Jupiter Sanctuary. This transformation is ultimately what has kept the temple in its present state of preservation.

The original excavations at the turn of the 19th century was led by O. Puchstein, who suggested a dedication to Bacchus. This was based on the sculptural decoration of both the temple and the altar placed in front. In several places floral decoration, including wine populated with cupids and fauns, can be seen on the temple. Two severely damaged relief plates placed at the entrance to the adyton are the bases of his arguments. Puchstein's reconstruction of these shows Dionysus/Bacchus in a number of familiar iconographical scenes surrounded by different personas connected with him.

Today, it is virtually impossible to see these images. A century has passed since Puchstein made his reconstruction, the elements have erased the decoration on the reliefs.

However, other parts of the sculptural design points to a different dedication, which is supported by the knowledge of the presence of the Heliopolitan triad.

Underneath the massive doorway, a relief of an eagle holding the caduceus in its claws is shown - the eagle represents Jupiter and the caduceus Mercury. A temple to Mercury built beside a Jupiter temple seems in place.

Written sources and coins confirm that there was a temple to Mercury in Baalbek, which is identified by coin images found on a hill outside the city.

In recent years scholars have suggested a number of different solutions to the contradicting evidence concerning the dedication of the temple. However, it is a continuing discussion.

"The Temple of Venus"

South-east of the Jupiter and Bacchus temples, a small enclosure shows traces of two small temples and an altar. One of these is a round temple, much smaller and very different from the larger temples of the city. This temple is known as "The temple of Venus". Based on analysis of the sculptural decoration, the other temple, in the enclosure, is identified as a temple to the muses.

Architecturally this round temple is much less conventional than the surrounding temples. A horseshoe formed platform measuring 17 x 9 meters, with stairs in the northern end, contains the round cella. A small pronaos consisting of two rows of 4 Corinthian columns is placed in front of the cella. The stairs and the pronaos take up more than half the space of the platform. The cella itself has a diameter of about 9 meters. It is surrounded by four additional Corinthian columns, besides the ones forming the adyton. Be-

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tween each of these columns curved recesses are carved in both the podium and the entablature, five all together. Furthermore, niches are carved in the cella wall in each of these recesses.

The interior of the cella consists of two tiers of columns, the lower ionic, the upper Corinthian, intertwined by a niche for every third column. The cult image was probably placed in the middle of the cella.

A precise reconstruction of the front of the temple is not possible due to the state of preservation. It is on the basis of this architectural innovation and decoration that the temple is dated to the first half of the 3rd Century AD. The focus on convex and concave counterparts gives the temple a vibrant look – typical of the baroque style the building represents. Architectural comparisons are mostly found in the private architecture, with Hadrian's villa in Tivoli as the prime example.



Fig. 3: "The temple of Venus"

The temple was by the original excavators interpreted as a temple to Venus. This was based on the decorative scheme where seashells with doves and other themes connected to Venus are seen topping the niches on the outside of the cella wall. However, after travelling around between the Roman temples in the region it becomes clear that an argument for a dedication to Venus based on seashell-decoration is completely invalid. A large number of temples in this region have these types of decorations, which are perhaps connected to the past Phoenician culture and art tradition of the region.

Naturally, a dedication to Venus is desirable in connection with the Heliopolitan triad. If the temple

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next to the Jupiter sanctuary is in fact a temple to Mercury, a temple dedicated to Venus, the last member of the group, placed in the immediate vicinity would be expected.

However, as with the Mercury temple, a Venus temple has been identified in the eastern part of the city. This is confirmed both by inscriptions and by the finding of cult image of Venus.

Several other dedication theories have been put forward, some more credited than others. Coins showing Tyche have been found in the enclosure and a Tychaion has therefore been suggested. However, also Fortuna or the local Saint Barbara, to whom the later church was dedicated, are possible deities. Recent research points in many different directions.

When seeing the massive and richly adorned buildings it becomes clear that it must have been buildings of great importance.

Perhaps the answer to the riddle of the two temples lies in the understanding of the Heliopolitan triad and the complexity of the mixed cultures that arose in the new Roman colonies, where a strong religious and cultural life was already present.

The old Semitic gods, created around the cycle of life and death following the year, were not directly translatable to the Roman gods, and therefore it seems likely that different qualities from different Roman gods were applied to create a sort of "hybrid god". In the case of "the Bacchus temple" the god could perhaps have the name Mercury but at the same time embody some of the qualities and responsibilities normally associated with Bacchus.

Baalbek is, as shown here, a site that upon visiting truly invites you to take a closer look at the impressive buildings and perhaps form your own opinion and answers to the many unanswered questions.

Further Reading

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