

THE LEBANON MOUNTAINS

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Looking out over the valleys, a trio of monuments stands out at the north ridge at Qalaat Faqra. Most often they are labeled as “The tower”, “The (big) altar” and “The colonnaded monument (or small altar)” (fig. 1). The latter two are heavily restored while the tower still stands as it was when travelers of the 19th and early 20th century visited the site. The vantage point on the ridge gives the trio a magnificent view of the maze-like rock-formation behind the well-preserved Zeus Beelgalasos temple in the sanctuary (fig. 2). Below this temple there is a second smaller temple, later turned into a basilica (fig. 3).



Fig. 1: The three monuments on the ridge.

The colonnaded monument is situated a bit lower in the landscape than the other two, and it is the southernmost of the three. The monument stands today 3.2 m high and was first reconstructed in 1943 (fig. 4). The square base is 0.6 m high, and on this rests a solid core surrounded by a peristyle with four columns facing each of the four directions. The top of the monument consists of a cornice crowned



Fig. 2: The large temple and surrounding temenos built up against the maze-like rock-formation.



Fig. 3: The smaller temple seen from the larger temple.

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by a second cornice element that is hollow-moulded – a so-called Egyptian cornice. Up against one side is set a block carved into steps reaching the peristyle. The monument seems at odds with Roman and Greek architectural schemes, but similar monuments are well known from the Levant, with examples (among others) at Hosn Niha, Qsarnaba and Palmyra. The Qsarnaba example is situated as an altar right at the front of the temple. The one in Hosn Niha is dedicated to a local divinity.



Photo: Niels Bargfeldt

Fig. 4: The colonnaded monument.



Photo: Niels Bargfeldt

Fig. 5: The tower seen from the southeast.

The most imposing monument is the tower, even though only the lower level of the structure remains standing. The base forms a square of approximately 15.7 x 15.7 m (fig. 5). The preserved part rises to around 10 m. Access is gained by a flight of stairs that leads to the main entrance on the east side (fig. 6). A double door gives passage to an antechamber, while a second smaller single door entrance is situated on the south side of the building. Inside the tower a staircase leads through corridors to the top of the preserved structure. At every turn of the interior staircase it seems that the passageway could be sealed off (fig. 7). A chamber that could be sealed off by a portcullis (trapdoor) is situated within the core of the preserved part.

The wall fragments on the preserved top show that the structure had at least one upper storey, and that a staircase gave access to a roof or third storey. The second storey had a chamber as well. This is offset from the centre but had a centrally placed double door facing east. The chamber was surrounded by hallways on all sides. Towards the front this story had an opening, presumably with two pillars, making the entrance to the chamber visible from the east. In this *loggia* there supposedly was found a double statue base.

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Photo: Niels Bargfeldt

Fig. 6: The approaching flight of stairs.



Photo: Niels Bargfeldt

Fig. 7: A junction where the interior corridor can be sealed off.

The function of the monument has been somewhat debated. On earlier reconstruction drawings the tower is topped by a slender pyramidal roof. This gives an impression of a Hellenistic mausoleum and is reminiscent of architectural styles/monuments found in Anatolia such as the grave of Mausolus in Halicarnassus and perhaps the Belvei monument. As for buildings with pyramidal roof in the more immediate region, structures in Homs and Hermel can be mentioned – the function of the one at Hermel is not clear. Later reconstruction attempts have stripped the pyramid and given the building a flat roof crowned by a crenellation of stepped blocks – such blocks have been found scattered in the vicinity. Two inscriptions are still to be found on the monument: One above the main entrance and another at the north corner. The one on the lintel dedicates the building to the Emperor Claudius and the god Beelgalasos (fig. 8):



Photo: Niels Bargfeldt

Fig. 8: The inscription on the lintel.

Αὐτοκράτορι Τιβερίω Καίσαρι
Σεβαστῶι και θε[εῶι] πατρ[ῶι Βε]
ελγαλασῶι ἐπὶ Γαίου Κα...

To the emperor Tiberius Claudius
and to the ancestral God Beel-
galasos under Gaius Ca(sius
Longinus)

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The second one gives a date of AD 43-44 (355 Seleucid era) and tells us under whose supervision and by which funds the monument was built (fig. 9):



Fig. 9: The inscription at the north corner of the tower.

ΛΕΝΤΕ ΠΙΣ ΣΥΝ
ΠΑΡΒΟΛΟΜΟΥ
ΕΡΗΜΕΛΗΤΟΥ
ΕΚ ΤΩΝ ΤΟΥ
ΜΕΓΙΣΤΟΥ
ΘΕΟΥ ΩΚΟΔΟΜΗΘΗ

355 under Tholom son of Rabbo-
mos the magistrate, built at the
expense of the great god

Considering the function of the structure, it has been suggested that it served as a strongbox and guard tower for the sanctuary below. The chamber in the core and the possibility to seal off the corridors at multiple junctions seem to support this hypothesis. Though such a function is very plausible, the main reason for building the monument probably has more to do with the inscriptions and ties into the political situation around the time of construction. The territory had been a part of the Ituraean domain but was given to Herod the Great under Augustus. By the time of emperor Claudius, Qalaat Faqra might not have been directly in the domain of the client king Agrippa II, yet in AD 44 the entire region was annexed by Rome and came directly under the control of the emperor. This turning point for the local community would have been an occasion for gaining favour with the new overlords and dominant force in the region by erecting a monument to the imperial cult at their own initiative.

Like the colonnaded monument, the big altar that stands about 50 m east of the tower was reconstructed in the mid forties (fig. 10). The base of the altar is a square approximately 5.3 x 5.3 m. The middle section is reconstructed with three courses of blocks. Above the cornice, the structure is crowned by slabs with stepped pyramidal crenellation in low relief. In one place there is an opening in the slabs that gives passage to the top of the altar – presumably by a ladder. Because of its position and height it has been suggested that the structure served as an altar for the cult activities related to the tower.

The conjunction between the tower and the big altar gives an exciting example of an imperial cult installation, which is very different to the urban Roman temples for emperors in fora found all over the Empire. Whether or not we can be certain of the above mentioned circumstances as sufficient

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explanation for the reasons for the building the two monuments, it does seem from the inscription that the tower was inaugurated at some point to the emperor Claudius.

However, one impression gained by visiting the ridge is that there are still much to be explored and explained, as there are visible remains of other structures and paved areas around the three usually described monuments (fig. 11). These are a circular well, remains of walls south of the tower, a foundation behind the big altar, a foundation north of the colonnaded monument and a paved area north of the colonnaded monument.



Fig. 10: The big altar seen from the top of the tower.



Fig. 11: The tumbled remains in front of the tower.

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BEIT MARY, DEIR EL-QALAA

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Beit Mary (Arabic: بيت مري, Syr.: Bet Mâré – “Home of the Lord”) is a Lebanese town, which occupies a hill 750-800 meters above sea level. The town is important for its ancient Roman and Byzantine remains as well as the Maronite monastery of Saint John the Baptist (known itself as Deir el-Qalaa), which was built in the 18th century.

Located 16 km from Beirut, overlooking the part of Lebanon’s Mediterranean coast, the town includes Deir el-Qalaa as an archeological site situated on the highest hill in Beit Mary (figs. 1-2), which holds monuments from the Roman and Byzantine era. The first descriptions of the site and of the architecture of the buildings were provided by Renan’s expedition in the 1860s. The Roman architectural ensemble was identified as comprising three temples and an ‘*aire sacree*’ located south-west from them in an antique agglomeration.



Fig. 1: A map indicating Beit Mary and Deir el-Qalaa.

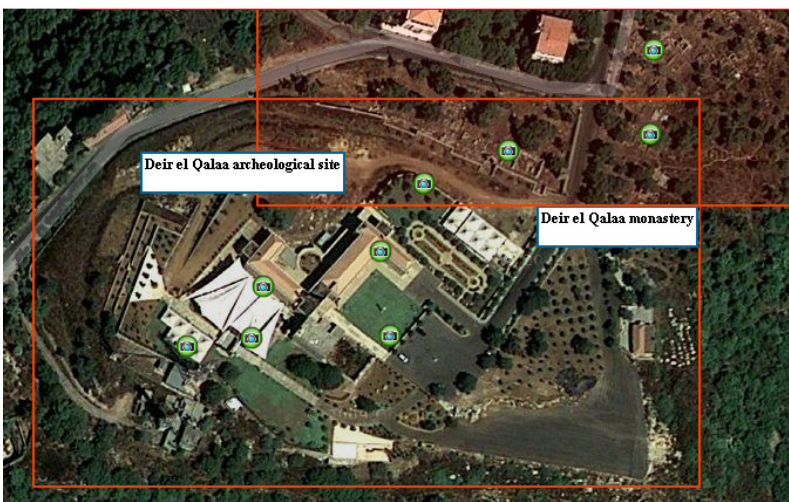


Fig. 2: A plan of the Deir el-Qalaa archeological site.

At the top are still visible remains of an *adyton* of the Roman temple (Grand temple A) (fig. 3) dedicated to the local god Balmarcod – attributed on the basis of the numerous inscriptions (fig. 4). The temple comprises a later Maronite chapel built on parts of its foundations near the monastery (remains of the *cella* can be observed as a floor of the actual unfinished church).

The site was agreeable to the Romans, who made it a center of prayer and worship, constructing besides the great Balmarcod temple several smaller temples (temple B and presumably temple C) surrounding it. Two other temples were put up some three 300 m away; one of them is identified as dedicated to the goddess Juno.

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Photo: Mariana Bodnaruk

Fig. 3: Remains of the walls of temple A of Baal Marqod. The *adyton*.



Photo: Mariana Bodnaruk

Fig. 4: Altar with a dedication in latin to Jupiter Balmarcod and Juno at Deir el-Qalaa.

The main temple (A) of Roman architectural style was built during the 2nd century CE. It was 42 m long, 18 m wide, 14 m high and had a wooden roof. On the façade there were six columns; 7.20 m high and weighing 51 metric tons. This major temple has masonry intact up to three meters (of the *adyton*'s part). Three of the six columns are still standing, although not at their original height, approaching one of the temples of Baalbek in their size (fig. 5). Remains of the Ionic column capital were found due to archeological research and it can still be observed at the place.



Photo: Mariana Bodnaruk

Fig. 5: The grand temple's (A) Ionic columns at Deir el-Qalaa

In 1938, a German archeological expedition headed by D. Krencker and W. Zschietzschmann proposed a plan of temple A reconstructed as a north-west oriented tetrastyle prostyle temple with no podium (fig. 6). According to the reconstruction plan the temple had two stairways, a proper *pronaos*, a *cella* with rectangular walls with pilasters, and an *adyton*. Although the *ady-*

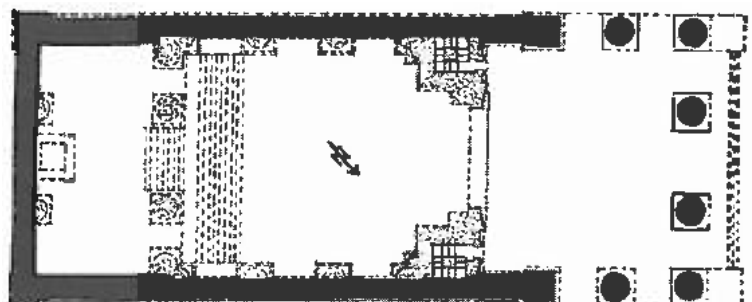


Fig. 6: A ground plan of the grand temple A in Deir el-Qalaa after D. Krencker and W. Zschietzschmann (from J. Aliquot).

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ton, constructed from megalithic blocks, is partially preserved, it still remains uncertain if a crypt existed, despite having been proposed by a number of scholars. The north-west orientation is rather atypical for the majority of the Lebanese Roman temples. Temples oriented to the west are rather rare, and for this reason the temple at Deir el-Qalaa is most notable. According to statistics proposed by J. Aliquot, 51 of 68 temples are oriented towards the east, two towards south-west, three towards north-east, and twelve have a different orientation, including a north-west orientation (as in the case of the temple at Bziza). Similarly to the orientation of the temple at Bziza, which overlooks the valley, the grand temple A at Deir el-Qalaa happens to be constructed in a direction towards the sea and ancient Berytos. Such a topographical explanation seems to be more convincing than speculations on the importance of a setting sun lighting up the cult statue in the sanctuary.

Foundations of other buildings are grouped around the main sanctuary. Remains of the so-called '*aire sacree*', as identified by J. Aliquot, with a southern sector delimited by a portico, is situated south-west of the temple A. There is a monumental gateway (fig. 7) and a processional path, linking the grand temple A with the second temple (B) located in the northern direction. This temple is also dated to the 2nd century CE. Reconstructed by H. Kalayan, although without a precise plan, the small temple B has dimensions of 11.30 x 8.60 m, and it is identified as dedicated to Juno, a patron goddess of Rome and the Roman empire, worshipped together with Jupiter and Minerva as a triad. It had porticoes which could separate the temple from its court, so that they could exist independently, yet remaining a constitutive part of a coherent composition. Similarly to the main temple (A), temple B was a north-west oriented tetrastyle prostyle temple. No podium was confirmed there. Some votives from the upper parts of the temple are visible at the place.

A short walk down the hill to the north leads to the site of the small third temple (C), allegedly identified as such. There are few elements of the temple preserved, and these only allow an assumption about the type of the building. Presumably it was also facing north-west. Unlike the bigger temples A and B, the temple C is currently an extensive area of scattered ruins.



Fig. 7: A monumental doorway to temple B.

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The major epigraphical dossier collecting all inscriptions of the site is presented by J.-P. Rey-Coquais. It contains inscriptions in both Latin and Greek as well as bilingual ones, which are important for the revealing of a chronology of the place. They show evidence for dedications to the principal deity Jupiter, as IOMH, as well as to Venus and Mercury, together constituting the Heliopolitan triad. Moreover, the honorary inscriptions mention gods of Berytos, such as Mater Matuta, a genius, and Fortune of the colony, and the 2nd century Roman emperors (Trajan, Hadrian, Septimius Severus). A dedication to the local divinity Jupiter Balmarcod is attested in the epigraphic evidence (fig. 4). Balmarcod was the great deity of the sanctuary at Deir el-Qalaa, the Roman colony of Berytos, whose identity provokes an intensive scholarly debate. Few different modern interpretations have been proposed regarding the name itself. Balmarcod was considered to be a semitic name composed of two parts – *b'l* (the name Bal) and *rqd* (a dancer). A noted French orientalist and archaeologist Ch. Clermont-Ganneau considers that *mrqd* is a toponym with the meaning 'a place where you dance,' alluding to the cult practiced in this region of Lebanon. Yet R. Dus-saud proposes that the term *mrqd* designates neither a place nor sacred dances. Rather it should be translated as an earth tremble. Following a discussion, Lipinski put forward a hypothesis that it is a name of a god, namely Baal Marcod, with a relation to the ancient place of Deir el-Qalaa. According to inscriptions, his nomenclature includes duos: Balmarcodes, dominus Balmarcodes, Jupiter Balmarcodes, IOMB, Βαλμαρκως δεσπότης, θεός Βααλμαρκοθ, θεός 'άγιος Βαλ. The supreme deity was honored with epithets traditional for religious rhetoric of the Roman Near East; great (*maximus*), unique (μόνος), the best (*optimus*, γενναίος), and sovereign (*dominus*, δεσπότης, κύριος). The Romans, being present in the area since Pompey's appropriation of Syria, imported a Capitoline triad to the region and then assimilated Bal Marcod with Jupiter.

As S. Ronzevalle assumed, the sanctuary played the same role for Berytos that d'Afqa played for Byblos. In turn, Rey-Coquais emphasized that it was not a village sanctuary. The high place that dominated Berytos can be compared to the high places d'Afqa and Baalbek.

Following the discovered Roman road to the north of the temple area is a remarkably well preserved Roman bath of excellent workmanship. In one of the rooms it is possible to observe the heating system through a hole in the floor. The hypocaust, the Roman system of central/under floor heating for public baths and private houses used to conduct heat with hot air, are still in place. There was also heating in the walls provided by terracotta pipes. The bath intended for public use was supplied with water from reservoirs placed higher up. Once a Roman settlement, the entire site holds remains of a second bath and a colonnaded street. Thus, it is apparent that there was an inhabited quarter close to the temple area, since the bath is usually associated with a populated place.

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Of particular note is a mosaic floor with incorporated *spolia* (e.g. one of the reused temple columns) of the late antique basilica (figs. 8-9) situated south of the Roman bath. The three-aisled basilica of the 6th century shows a further christianization of the site. Its floor mosaics are highly coloured and well executed; they are shaped in a way representing a cross.



Fig. 8-9: An original mosaic floor of the 6th century late antique church at Deir el-Qalaa.

The later church, dedicated to Saint John the Baptist, was constructed in 1748 and has apparently been rebuilt a number of times since then. The site's property was given to the Anthonite Order of monks by Emir Youssef Mrad Abi Allamah for the construction of the monastery. The first stone was laid in 1747 by the monk Simon Arida of Katalat, followed by Superior General Father Ibrahim Aoun of Roumieh in the Metn, who went to Rome to collect funds. They first made an extensive cellar stretching south from the church to the refectory over which rooms and a large vaulted hall were built. The monastery was built right on top of the remains of the Roman temples.

However, the actual church near the monastery, which stands over the wall of the great Baal Marqod's temple, was erected in 1762, and the date of its construction is engraved over the west door, together with the name of the founder Ibrahim Aoun. Before this church was built, the monks used to pray in the chapel dedicated to St. Anthony. The old church is incorporated into the present early 20th century structure (fig. 10). Heavily damaged in the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990) and occupied until 2005 by Syrian soldiers, the monastery's reconstruction is an ongoing process.



Fig. 10: Deir el-Qalaa Maronite monastery

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