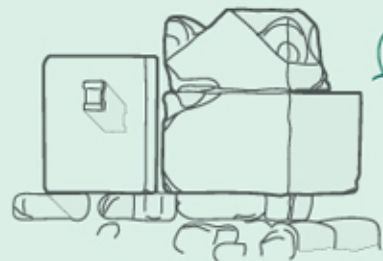


Baalbeck



Baalbeck, Lebanon's greatest Roman treasure, can be counted among the wonders of the ancient world. The largest and most noble Roman temples ever built, they are also among the best preserved. Towering high above the Beqaa plain, their monumental proportions proclaimed the power and wealth of Imperial Rome. The gods worshipped here, the Triad of Jupiter, Venus and Mercury, were grafted onto the indigenous deities of Hadad, **Atargatis** and a young male god of fertility. Local influences are also seen in the planning and layout of the temples, which vary from the classic roman design.

Over the centuries Baalbeck's monuments suffered from theft, war and earthquakes, as well as from numerous medieval additions. Fortunately, the modern visitor can see the site in something close to its original form thanks to work in the past hundred years by Germans, French and Lebanese archaeologists.

Baalbeck is located on two main historic trade routes, one between Mediterranean coast and the Syrian interior and the other between northern Syria and northern Palestine. Today the city, 85 kilometers from Beirut, is an important administrative and economic center in the northern Beqaa valley.

The Temples in History

For centuries the temples of Baalbeck layed under meters of rubble, obscured by medieval fortifications. But even in ruin the site attracted the admiration of visitors and its historical importance was recognized.

The first survey and restoration work at Baalbeck was begun by the German Archaeological Mission in



Aerial view of the Acropolis

1898. In 1922 French scholars undertook extensive research and restoration of the temples, work which was continued by the Lebanese Directorate General of Antiquities.

Baalbeck's temples were built on an ancient tell that goes back at least to the end of the third millennium B.C. Little is known about the site during this period, but there is evidence that in the course of the 1st millennium B.C. an enclosed court was built on the ancient tell. An altar was set in the center of this court in the tradition of the biblical Semitic high places.

During the **Hellenistic period** (333-64 B.C.) the Greeks identified the god of Baalbeck with the sun god and the city was called **Heliopolis** or **City of the Sun**. At this time the ancient enclosed court was enlarged and a podium was erected on its western side to support a temple of classical form. Although the temple was never built, some huge structures from this Hellenistic project can still be seen. And it was over the ancient court that the Romans placed the present Great Court of the Temple of Jupiter. The temple was begun in the last quarter of the 1st century B.C.



and was nearing completion in the final years of Nero's reign (37-68 A.D.). The Great Court Complex of the Temple of Jupiter, with its porticoes, exedrae, altars and basins, was built in the 2nd century A.D. construction of the so-called temple of Bacchus was also started about this time.

The Propylaea and the Hexagonal Court of the Jupiter Temple were added in the 3rd century under the Severan Dynasty (193-235 A.D.) and work was presumably completed in the mid-3rd century. The small circular structure known as the Temple of Venus was probably finished at this time as well.

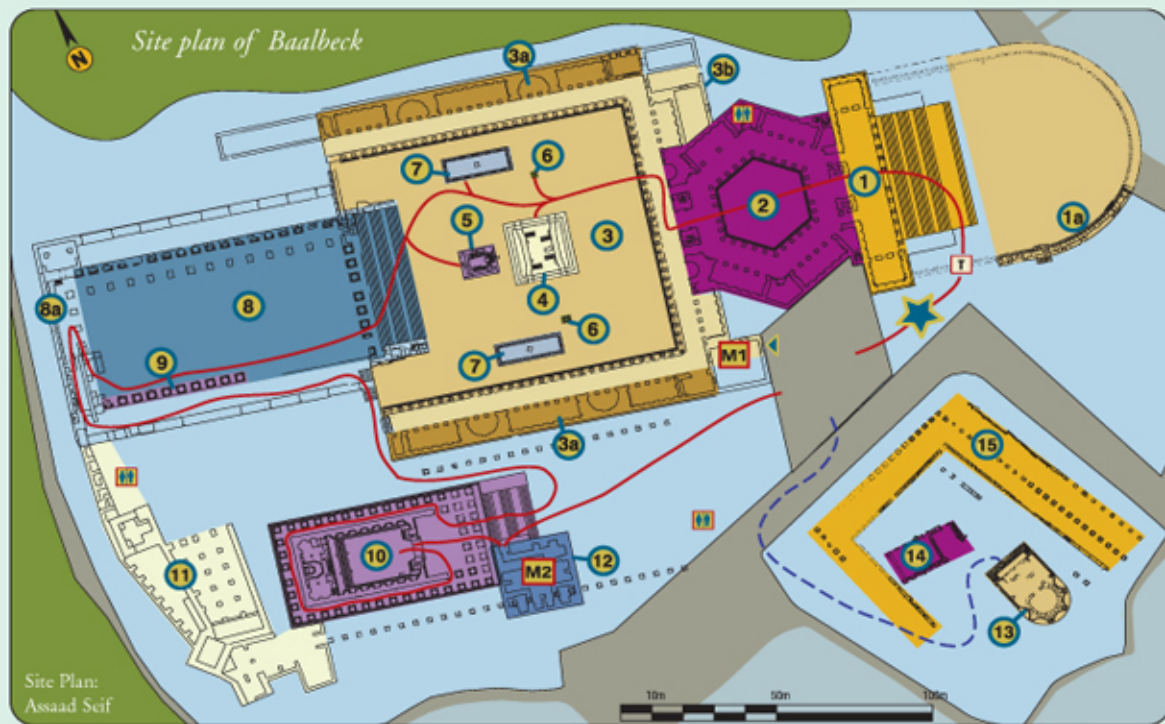
When Christianity was declared official religion of the **roman empire** in 313 A.D., **Byzantine Emperor Constantine**, officially closed the Baalbeck temples. At the end of the 4th century, the **Emperor Theodosius** tore down the altars of Jupiter's Great Court and built a basilica, using the temple's stones and architectural elements. After the Arab Conquest in 636 the temples were transformed into a fortress, or "qal'a", a term still applied to the Acropolis today. During the next centuries Baalbeck fell successively to the **Omayyad**, **Abbasid**, **Toulounid**, **Fatimid** and **Ayyoubid** dynasties. Sacked by the **Mongols** about 1260, Baalbeck later enjoyed a period of calm and prosperity under **Mamluk** rule.

The Sites

The temple complex of Baalbeck is made up of the **Jupiter Temple**, the **Bacchus Temple** and the **Venus Temple**. Only part of the staircase remains of a fourth temple dedicated to **Mercur**, on **Sheikh Abdullah** hill. **The Great Temple or "Jupiter Temple":**

The first view the visitor has of Baalbeck is the six Corinthian columns of the Great Temple, thrusting 22 meters into the skyline. Built on a podium seven meters above the Court, these six columns and the entablature on top give an idea of the vast scale of the original structure.

The complex of the Great Temple has a semi-circular peribol, the monumental entrance or Propylaea,



Site Plan:
Assaad Seif

Site Plan

1-The Propylaea

1a-Peribol

2-The Hexagonal Court

3-The Great Court

3a-The Decorated Niches

3b-The Stables

4-The Tower

5-The Sacrificial Altar

6-The 2 Columns

7-Water Pools

8-The Jupiter Temple

8a-The Trilithon

9-The 6 Corinthian Columns

10-The Bacchus Temple

11-The Arabic Citadel &

Mosque

12-The 15th Century Tower

13-The Venus Temple

14-The 9 Muses Temple

15-Portico

the Hexagonal Court, the Great Court and finally the Temple itself, where the six famous columns stand.

• **1) The Propylaea:** Completed in the mid-3rd century A.D., is approached by a large semicircle of stone benches and a partially restored stairway. The entrance structure has towers at either end and is fronted by 12 granite columns. An interior stairway goes to the top of the Propylaea where there is an excellent view of the area.

• **2) The Hexagonal Forecourt:** Three doors lead to it where 30 granite columns originally supported the entablature. This six-sided form was built between the Propylaea and the Great Court in the first half of the 3rd century A.D. At the end of the 4th century or the early 5th century, it was transformed into a church covered with a dome.

• **3) The Great Court:** Built in the 2nd century A.D., covered an area of 134x112 meters and contained the main installations of the cult. Structurally, the court is a platform built on the leveled-off top of the ancient artificial tell. The tell was consolidated on the eastern, northern and southern sides by **vaulted substructures** (3b), and on the western side by the temple's podium. These substructures supported the porticos and exedrae around the Court and were used for stables and storage.

The entire Court was enclosed by a succession of rectangular and semi-circular exedrae or recesses decorated by **niches** which contained **statues** (3a). Surrounding the Court, in front of the exedrae, was an 84 column Corinthian colonnade of Egyptian granite. On the exterior walls of the Court the remains of medieval battlements can still be seen.

• **4-5) Altar and Tower:** Two huge structures stand in the center of the Great Court: a restored sacrificial altar and a tower with only the lower courses remaining. The tower, dating from the beginning of the 1st century A.D., was probably built to allow the wor-



Temple of Bacchus



The Exedrae around the Great Court

shippers to view the proceedings from the top.

• **6-7) Two Columns and basins:** The Tower was flanked by two solitary columns of gray and red granite. Two pools for ritual washing, decorated with relief carvings, were placed north and south of both altar and tower. These structures were destroyed when a westward Christian basilica was built on the site at the end of the 4th century.

• **8-9) The Temple of Jupiter** (the Cella): This approach to the sanctuary through series of defined spaces was an apparent oriental adaptation.

The temple measures 88x48 meters and stands on a podium 13 meters above the surrounding terrain and 7 meters above the courtyard. It is reached by a monumental stairway.

Originally surrounded by 54 external columns, most of these now lie in fragments on the ground. The **six standing columns** (9) are joined by an entablature decorated with a frieze of bulls and lions' heads connected by garlands.

The Podium is built with some of the largest stone blocks ever hewn. On the west side of the podium is the "**Trilithon**" (8a), a cel-

ebrated group of three enormous stones weighing about 800 tons each.

• **10)The Little Temple** or the so-called **Temple of Bacchus:**

Constructed during the first half of the 2nd century A.D., it has been remarkably well preserved. While the Great Temple was dedicated to the public cult of the Heliopolitan Triad, the little temple was apparently consecrated to a mysterious and initiatic cult centered around the young god of Baalbeck. This god was identified as a solar and growth deity, whose birth and growth promised regeneration and eternal life to the faithful. Wine and other drugs, such as opium, may have been used by the worshipers and it was the carvings of grapes and poppies on the main door jamb and some carved Bacchic scenes, which suggested the temple's identifications with Bacchus. Thirty-three steps lead up to the entrance and the whole structure sits on a platform five meters high. The entrance through the lofty monumental gate and the view of its ornate interior constitute one of the loveliest sights of Baalbeck. The stairs on either side of the doorway may have had some ritual function.

• **11)The Ayyoubid Mosque:** Located at the West side of Bacchus temple.

• **12) The 15th century Mamluk tower:** At the corner of this temple is a good example of the Mamluk fortifications of Baalbeck.

• **13)The Round Temple** or the so-called **Temple of Venus:**



Omayyade Mosque before restoration

The gem-like temple southeast of the acropolis was built in the 3rd century A.D. Its design and size, as well as its orientation, set it apart from the other Baalbeck temples. These attributes also help identify it as the temple of the Fortune of Baalbeck, that is the tutelary divinity of the city, under the protection of its great gods. It was not by accident that during the byzantine period it was converted into a church dedicated to Saint Barbara, who is the patron saint of Baalbeck to this day.

• **14)-The Temple of the Muses:** the 9 Goddesses presiding over branches of learning and arts. It is located near the Venus temple dating back to the 1st century A.D.

• **15) The Remains of a Portico :** Situated next Venus temple.

Around the Town

There are a number of other roman remains and islamic sites to visit in Baalbeck and its immediate neighborhood.

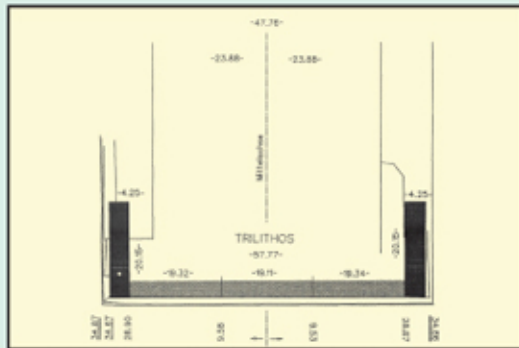
1)**The Great Mosque:** In front of acropolis entrance, this mosque dates from the 7th-8th centuries of the Omayyad period. Built on what was the site of the roman forum and later a byzantine church dedicated to St. John, the mosque reuses granite and limestone columns. There is a square minaret in the north-west corner of the courtyard.

2) **Public buildings:** At Boustan el-Khan; south of the temples are important remains of public baths, a market and probably a bouleuterion, or assembly place.

3) **Ras El-Ain:** This ancient spring, now incorporated into modern Baalbeck, has been a source of water since antiquity. Here are traces of a roman shrine and nymphaeum as well as remains of a Mamluk mosque built in 1277.

4) **Quarries:** At the southern entrance of the town





The Trilithon (Erwin Ruprechtsberger) "Von Steinburch zum Jupiter Temple von Heliopolis / Baalbeck (Libanon)" Linz Austria 1999 p. 49 Trilithon in gray. Location of the pregnant stone in black (either south or north).

is a quarry from where, the temples stones were cut in situ monolith I, and nearby monolith II still lying. There is another quarry at Al-Kiyayl, southwest of town after Qoubbat Douris.

Monolith I: A huge block still in situ where it was cut, almost 2,000 years ago. Called the "stone of the Pregnant Woman", it is 21.5 m x 4.8 m x 4.2 meters in size and weighs an estimated 1000,12 tons. This Monolith should be displayed south or north the temple, perpendicular to the trilithon (see the plan)

Monolith II: Not far from the pregnant stone is lying another monolith bloc, studied by Dr. Erwin Ruprechtsberger with a scholars team from Linz Museum in Austria 1996-1997, that they named Monolith II, the measurements show that it weights 1248 tons while the Monolith I weights 1000,12 tons, was used later on, maybe during the medieval age as quarry and than left.

5) **Qubbat al-Amjad:** On Sheikh Abdallah Hill are the remains of the Zawiya-Mosque and tomb of Sheikh 'Abdallah al-Younini, built under the rule of Al-Amjad, grand nephew of Saladin and governor of Baalbeck, between 1182 and 1230. it was constructed of stones from the neighboring temple of Mercury.

6) **City Gate:** Northwest of the Acropolis near the

army barracks lie the remains of a roman city gate, part of the fortifications that surround the city.

7) **Qoubbat as-Saadin:** Not far from the City Gate is a two-room mausoleum built in 1409, which served as a burial place for the Mamluk governors of Baalbeck.

8) **Qoubbat Douris:** At the southern entrance of town is the site of an octagonal structure composed of eight roman granite columns. Built during the 13th century, it was originally covered with a cupola and held an ayyoubid tomb.

9) **Roman Necropolis:** Accidentally unearthed in 1996 enclosing a gold treasure in Douris, 4km from Baalbeck and another one discovered in 2006, both enclosing a gold treasure.

10) **Sit Khawla Mausoleum:** The Imam el Hussein daughter, over her burial place stands now a beautiful mausoleum covered with blue ceramic and persian patterns.

11) **Temple of Mercury:** Built during the roman period (in the 1st century A.D.), over an earlier temple dedicated to the tutelary God of the city and protector of the crops and herds. The remains of the temple are accessible through a stairway carved in the bedrock.

The Baalbek international festival

launched in 1956, one of the most prestigious annual festival in Lebanon and in the whole region, combining music, dance, theatre, sound and light shows. World wide renowned artists perform there. It is held from early July through mid august each year. Transportation (2 ways) in buses from and to Beirut, Tripoli and Sidon is available etc...

For more information visit: www.baalbeck.org.lb

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