The ruined city of Byblos (Jbeil) is approx. 37 km north of Beirut. It has been inhabited since at least the Phoenician times. The particular history of this city and its relations with the Pharaonic Egypt of the 3rd millennium BC will make its glory and reputation. Byblos and its immediate surrounding are known in Greek mythology and ancient Mediterranean history. It is also known thanks to the dissemination of the alphabet. The city, like most of the Lebanese coastal cities, witnessed successive periods starting from the Phoenician to the modern period.

In it remains of Greek, Roman, Crusaders, and Ottoman structures are visible. The city retains an old part, and new modern parts that spread around the old market. Even though archaeological sites from the Phoenician and Roman periods are clearly identified, as well as a standing Crusader church, the old town seems to have been shaped in the Ottoman period. Earlier centuries from the Islamic period are not clearly defined through artificats in the city, but the old town with its narrow street and stone architecture is clearly permeated with stones from earlier periods. The city attracted archaeological expedition since the 19th century, and with the economic surge in recent years, the city is regaining a special aura, with summer festivals, long time renovation and restoration projects, and the establishment of a main university (the Lebanese American University) outside the city. The old city is also listed a World Heritage Site, whereas the modern city hosts businesses, medical and cultural centers, shopping malls, pubs and nightclubs, etc.

Visits

The St. John the Baptist Church was commissioned by the Genoese Crusaders, and built in 1155 over the remains of a Byzantine church. It was considered a cathedral and was partially destroyed during an earthquake in 1176 AD. Under Ottoman authorities it became a Ma- ronite church and was given to the Maronites as a gift by Prince Youssef Chehab of Lebanon in the mid-19700s, after they helped him cap- ture the city.

This church has a hybrid style of Byzantine, Crusader and Islamic styles. It has a basilican plan with vaulted ceiling. It is a small church with an impressive entrance and a small porch with distinct chevron pattern on its arches, similar to patterns on several buildings in Jerusalem from the same period. This pattern influenced later decoration of Ayyubid and Mamluk architecture in the region.

Roman Theater: The roman theater, which only five tiers remaining, was built around 21 B.C. It was moved from its original site between the city gate and The Great Temple to its present location near the seafront. The black marble in the center of the theater mark the location of a mosaic that has been preserved in The National Museum of Beirut.

The Castle of Byblos: the site of the Crusader castle was excavated by an early expedition dating from the period 1920-1921. In the beginning of the 13th century A.D., the Crusaders built a strong fortress, raising limestone stones from the site occupying the new stones to match the old site. The castle consisted of a courtyard, an enclosure with walls at each corner of the building, and a fifth tower in the middle of the north wall to defend the entrance. The whole castle was originally surrounded by a moat, which has been destroyed. In the Mamluk period, the castle was reused and some parts of it were restored.

The Temple of Obelisks: originally built on top of the “shaped temple”, the remains of the temple of the Obelisks were reused by archaeologists to their present location (11th century A.D). The temple was probably used as religious offerings. Also over 1200 inscriptions have been uncovered in this temple, including funerary figures made of stone covered with gold leaf.

Sultan Abd El-Majid: The ottoman-era mosque is thought to have been built on the site of an older mosque. The structure alone from 1860 and was renovated in 1991 by Byzantine Christians. The mosque is a late 18th century Ottoman Sultan Abd El-Majid. The Mosque of Sultan Abd El-Majid is located within the walled city walls, just outside the archaeological site.

The Crusader Castle: the site of the Crusader castle was excavated by an early expedition dating from the period 1920-1921. In the beginning of the 13th century A.D., the Crusaders built a strong fortress, raising limestone stones from the site occupying the new stones to match the old site. The castle consisted of a courtyard, an enclosure with walls at each corner of the building, and a fifth tower in the middle of the north wall to defend the entrance. The whole castle was originally surrounded by a moat, which has been destroyed. In the Mamluk period, the castle was reused and some parts of it were restored.

The city has many small historic buildings, which include the remains of the Phoenician Temple of Baalat Gebal, the Great Temple, the necropolis which includes nine underground tombs of Byblos Kings from the second millennium BC, the Roman theater, from the 3rd century, the Roman colonnade, fourth century Roman road and a fifth tower in the middle of the north wall to defend the entrance. The whole castle was originally surrounded by a moat, which has been destroyed. In the Mamluk period, the castle was reused and some parts of it were restored.

The renowned city of Byblos (Jbeil) is approx. 37 km north of Beirut. It has been inhabited since at least the Phoenician times. The particular history of this city and its relations with the Pharaonic Egypt of the 3rd millennium BC will make its glory and reputation. Byblos and its immediate surrounding are known in Greek mythology and ancient Mediterranean history. It is also known thanks to the dissemination of the alphabet. The city, like most of the Lebanese coastal cities, witnessed successive periods starting from the Phoenician to the modern period.

In it remains of Greek, Roman, Crusaders, and Ottoman structures are visible. The city retains an old part, and new modern parts that spread around the old market. Even though archaeological sites from the Phoenician and Roman periods are clearly identified, as well as a standing Crusader church, the old town seems to have been shaped in the Ottoman period. Earlier centuries from the Islamic period are not clearly defined through artifacts in the city, but the old town with its narrow street and stone architecture is clearly permeated with stones from earlier periods. The city attracted archaeological expedition since the 19th century, and with the economic surge in recent years, the city is regaining a special aura, with summer festivals, long time renovation and restoration projects, and the establishment of a main university (the Lebanese American University) outside the city. The old city is also listed as a World Heritage Site, whereas the modern city hosts businesses, medical and cultural centers, shopping malls, pubs and nightclubs, etc.

Visits

The St. John the Baptist Church was commissioned by the Genoese Crusaders, and built in 1155 over the remains of a Byzantine church. It was considered a cathedral and was partially destroyed during an earthquake in 1176 AD. Under Ottoman authorities it became a Maronite church and was given to the Maronites as a gift by Prince Youssef Chehab of Lebanon in the mid-1970s, after they helped him capture the city.

This church has a hybrid style of Byzantine, Crusader and Islamic styles. It has a basilican plan with vaulted ceiling. It is a small church with an impressive entrance and a small porch with distinct chevron pattern on its arches, similar to patterns on several buildings in Jerusalem from the same period. This pattern influenced later decoration of Ayyubid and Mamluk architecture in the region.

Roman Theater: The roman theater, which only five tiers remaining, was built around 21 B.C. It was moved from its original site between the city gate and The Great Temple to its present location near the seafront. The black marble in the center of the theater mark the location of a mosaic that has been preserved in The National Museum of Beirut.

The Crusader Castle: the site of the Crusader castle was excavated by an early expedition dating from the period 1920-1921. In the beginning of the 13th century A.D., the Crusaders built a strong fortress, raising limestone stones from the site occupying the new stones to match the old site. The castle consisted of a courtyard, an enclosure with walls at each corner of the building, and a fifth tower in the middle of the north wall to defend the entrance. The whole castle was originally surrounded by a moat, which has been destroyed. In the Mamluk period, the castle was reused and some parts of it were restored.

The Temple of Obelisks: originally built on top of the “shaped temple”, the remains of the temple of the Obelisks were reused by archaeologists to their present location (11th century A.D). The temple was probably used as religious offerings. Also over 1200 inscriptions have been uncovered in this temple, including funerary figures made of stone covered with gold leaf.

Sultan Abd El-Majid: The ottoman-era mosque is thought to have been built on the site of an older mosque. The structure alone from 1860 and was renovated in 1991 by Byzantine Christians. The mosque is a late 18th century Ottoman Sultan Abd El-Majid. The Mosque of Sultan Abd El-Majid is located within the walled city walls, just outside the archaeological site.

The Crusader Castle: the site of the Crusader castle was excavated by an early expedition dating from the period 1920-1921. In the beginning of the 13th century A.D., the Crusaders built a strong fortress, raising limestone stones from the site occupying the new stones to match the old site. The castle consisted of a courtyard, an enclosure with walls at each corner of the building, and a fifth tower in the middle of the north wall to defend the entrance. The whole castle was originally surrounded by a moat, which has been destroyed. In the Mamluk period, the castle was reused and some parts of it were restored.

The Temple of Obelisks: originally built on top of the “shaped temple”, the remains of the temple of the Obelisks were reused by archaeologists to their present location (11th century A.D). The temple was probably used as religious offerings. Also over 1200 inscriptions have been uncovered in this temple, including funerary figures made of stone covered with gold leaf.

Sultan Abd El-Majid: The ottoman-era mosque is thought to have been built on the site of an older mosque. The structure alone from 1860 and was renovated in 1991 by Byzantine Christians. The mosque is a late 18th century Ottoman Sultan Abd El-Majid. The Mosque of Sultan Abd El-Majid is located within the walled city walls, just outside the archaeological site.
The mountains and valleys west of Byblos are superb. The reputation of some of them is rooted in Greek and Roman mythology, such as the valley of Adonis, where a Roman aqueduct attests to its importance. Approximately 34 kilometers from Byblos, Nahr Ibrahim, formerly called Adonis River, is rich with legends. According to Greek and Phoenician mythology, Adonis, God of Love and Beauty, was killed by a boar sent by Ares, god of War. His blood flowed into the waters of the river, which was named after him. Just off the seaside road, 6 kilometers south of Byblos, there is a 19th century Ottoman bridge that allows access over the river. Going further inland from this road, you will arrive at the Valley of the ancient Adonis River where Zoubeida’s Roman aqueduct still stands. It was restored during the reign of the Emir Bashir Shehab (first half 19th century), and is suspended over the valley.

Furthermore, the area of Maad, at approximately 20 kilometers from Byblos, shelters a renowned temple devoted to Adonis and Astarte, destroyed in the 4th century under Emperor Constantine’s orders, only to become a Christian pilgrimage site over the centuries, dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The road passing through the hinterland of Jbeil towards Mnaitra arrives to Yanouh, at around 30 kilometers east from Byblos. This peaceful village has a very tumultuous history, evidenced by the various ruins that stand there. The Archaeological site named Kharayeb buried the remains of the Bronze Age until the Ottoman period. On the main road stands a temple built in Roman times and abandoned at the end of this same period, at its side a Christian basilica was founded at the beginning of the Early Byzantine period. In the 12th century, the Yanouh site will be turned into the Seat of the Maronite Patriarchate. At that time, the Roman temple was transformed into a church, hence its designation of the name “Saint George the Blue.” In the vicinity of the temple are found ten churches, a witness of a glorious past. Mnaitra is seven kilometers south from Yanouh, where are found the ruins of a medieval fortress called El Hoson. It is an obligatory passage to the Bekaa. This fortress controlled a natural path which allowed linking Mnaitra to the Bekaa, the reason why the site was repeatedly controlled by the Arab and the Crusaders. Starting 1176, it is dominated by the Count of Tripoli. The visitor can admire the various Hellenistic, Roman and Crusade ruins of the site.