

7. *Zāmīr* can, neither here nor in Cant. ii, 12, mean the first pruning of vine, which is done in March, but the second pruning in June or July. Here June is meant. The knife or sickle used in pruning is still called *zābūra* in some parts of Palestine, which reminds one of the Hebrew *zāmīr*.

8. The month of fruit-harvest will be July. In the calendar of the Beduin, the three months of *kēd* are June, July, and August. Then July may be called the month of fruit-harvest *par excellence*.

Now August and September are wanting to make the year complete. The \aleph and \beth at the margin may be a hint of these two months.

I find it most probable that the dubious sign before *āsīph*, *zera'*, *lākīsh*, *kōl*, and *zāmīr* is \aleph , as the article is very necessary in these cases. The article is not used before *shē'ōrim*, as it is never done in the designation of barley-harvest and wheat-harvest in Biblical Hebrew, evidently because it was a very common expression. The same will be true about *yerach kayiṣ* without the article, although we cannot prove it.

JERUSALEM, *January 22nd*, 1909.

[NOTE.—Too late for more than mention, we have received a proof of an Article by the Rev. Father H. Vincent, written for the *Revue Biblique*, on the subject of the Hebrew "Calendar" Tablet, which will appear in the next issue of the *Revue*, and of which we hope to give an Abstract.]

NOTES FROM DAMASCUS AND THE ANTI-LIBANUS.

By the Rev. J. E. HANAUER.

DAMASCUS, its scenery, surroundings, people, bazaars and mosques, have been so often described by travellers and in guide-books that it seems superfluous to attempt to write any more about them. My apology for submitting the following notes is, that though they refer to matters of very trifling significance and importance, yet they were things new to me who had never, previous to March, 1908, visited Damascus, and they struck me by their novelty and quaintness in a manner in which they did not seem to have awakened the attention of others who did not, or perhaps from a lack of a knowledge of Arabic could not notice them.

A person acquainted, as the writer was, principally with the Arabic dialect in use in Jerusalem and its vicinity, finds the curious drawl with which the Damascenes close their sentences very odd. Equally strange are some of the idioms and expressions. The substitution of an "o" for "a" by many of the lower classes in pronouncing words may safely be attributed to an Aramaic or Syriac influence. Dr. Bliss has in a former issue of the *Quarterly Statement* (1890) described Ma'alula and its dialect, and residents in Damascus tell me that in some of the villages in the district to the north the vowels used vary in every case in pronouncing the very same words.

Connected with the language-question is that of the vigorous and maledictory nature of prohibitive notices written in large letters on walls in various parts of the city. In Jerusalem, a notice forbidding anyone to pluck the flowers or fruit in a garden is generally couched thus: "Behold with thine eye but touch not with thy hand," but at Damascus the notice always commences, "Accursed, and the son of one accursed, be he who," etc. This commencement-formula reminds one involuntarily of Ebal and Gerizim, the inscriptions on Phœnician sarcophagi (Eshmunazar's for instance) and Shakespeare's epitaph. The expression "God is your steward" is also one not often used at Jerusalem.

From philological curiosities I now come to novel sights in the public roads and market. Some of the articles of domestic furniture differ in shape and character from those seen further south. The *leben*, for instance, is never brought to the Jerusalem market in cylindrical buckets made of willow or poplar wood, nor are the oil-skins made into a shape something like those of jars, nor would any respectable *fellahah* venture to ride behind her husband and astride the same animal as is done here, and nowhere, except in the Damascus district, have I seen frogs sold for food, nor yet truffles, tarragon, or the small plums called "generic." I specially mention truffles because of the curious stories told about them. They are said to grow wild underground in the desert, the only persons able to detect their presence being the mysterious and poverty-stricken "Arab eş-Şüleyb" (عرب الصليب), who dig them up and bring them to market in considerable quantities. The truffle, it is popularly said, is only found after thunder-storms, and grows where the lightning has struck the desert sand. The Arab eş-Şüleyb, it is asserted, live solely by the chase, dress themselves in garments

made of gazelle-skin and bear the name "Şüleyb," or "little-cross," because, although nominally Moslems, yet they wear small crosses under their garments, and are the descendants of a tribe of Christian Bedu, who many centuries ago were forcibly converted to Islam. This account, which savours of folk-lore, is all the information I am, at present, able to furnish on this subject.

Close to the dilapidated tower, built by Melik Shah, at the north-east corner of Damascus, is the ruined mosque of Sheikh Raslan (more properly Arslân), occupying a site on which, according to old travellers (Pococke, II, i, p. 121; Schubert, III, p. 299; and Robinson, III, p. 463, footnote), there formerly stood a church of St. Simeon Stylites, and, before that, a temple of Serapis. I call attention to it because of the curious local Moslem and Jewish legends therewith connected.

According to Murray (1868), p. 455, quoted in other Guide-books, Sheikh Arslân was a Mohammedan poet of some note and of the time of Nureddin. Other accounts, representing the popular local notions, were, however, given me by Moslems who came up whilst I was photographing the ruined shrine, and afterwards by different Jews to whom I showed my photographs. (a) My first Moslem informant in answer to my question as to who Sheikh Raslan was, and what he had done, readily answered that he was a "Mujahid," or soldier of the wars of Islam, and was buried here. It was clear from this that he had somewhere heard of the exploits of Arslân, who, however, does not seem, as far as I can gather from reading, to have ever visited Damascus. This statement, however, was promptly contradicted by another Moslem the caretaker of the adjoining Moslem cemetery. He asserted that Sheikh Raslan himself is not buried here, but that the maqâm marks the sepulchre of two Nazarene welis, or saints, both of them bearing the name of Sim'an. One was a Habashy, or Abyssinian, who had carried Sayidna 'Isa in his arms when a child, and the other a miracle-worker who had restored the sight of No'man the king, whose palace used to stand close by, where till recently there was the leper-settlement. "This No'man," he continued "was an Arab king who, hearing of Sim'an, came to him and said, 'I hear that you assert that 'Isa, to whom you pray, can cure the lame, the blind, and the halt. If this be true, pray to him on my behalf, and I vow that if he restore my sight I will become a Christian.' His request was granted and henceforth he distinguished himself by

helping forward the religion of 'Isa." The caretaker further stated that the two Christian saints buried here now and then awake, leave their graves, and are seen by living men. He himself had obtained a glimpse of them. It was one evening, some time after sunset, that he noticed two tall men, one of them dark-skinned, and the other dressed like a Greek priest. They were standing together close to a barred window which he pointed out to us. Not realizing who they were he saluted them. They smiled in return, but did not otherwise answer his salutation, so he passed on his way, but the instant his back was turned to them they burst into loud laughter. He turned round to see what was the matter, but was astonished to find that they had vanished, nor did he see them again though he searched every nook and corner where a person might be in hiding. So he realized too late who the couple were. Had he but recognized them in time his fortune would have been made, it being well-known that if welis appear to living men they will grant the latter anything and everything they ask for.

I relate this because it seems to bring out two points. The first is that a tradition concerning a church of Simeon Stylites, the existence of which was doubted by Robinson (see reference above), still lingers amongst the people at Damascus. The other point is that it appears from history that of various Ghassanid rulers named No'man, there was one who was converted to Christianity. The legend perhaps refers to him, and the traditional House of Naaman, now razed to the ground, but which till recently used to be pointed out to tourists, may have been the site, not of the dwelling of the famous leper mentioned in Scripture, but of this or some other Arab ruler of a similar name.

(b) I now come to the Jewish legends of which I have heard variants, but which are in substance as follows:—"In ancient times, before the era of Mohammed, the Jews of Damascus were dreadfully persecuted by their Christian fellow-citizens and at last expelled altogether. When the Moslems took Damascus, Omar (*sic*), who favoured the Jews, allowed them to settle in the neighbouring village of Jôbar, where they still possess a synagogue. Later on, they were allowed to settle again at Damascus, but were exposed to annoyance from the Mohammedans. So severe did the persecutions become that ten eminent Rabbis, of whom Sheikh Raslan was one, and Sheikh Muhyeddin (whose shrine is shown at Es-Sâlahîyeh) another, met together, and after

solemn deliberations, prayed to the Most High for permission to devote their own souls to destruction in order to save their people. A voice from Heaven (*bath kól*) approved of their petition and assured them that they would be endued with power to work miracles. Hereupon they assumed the Moslem garb, and professing to belong to the number of the 'Sohabah,' healed many sick folk, thus gaining such influence amongst the Mahomedans that they were entrusted with the custody of the original manuscripts of the Koran. These they revised, inserting certain passages which inculcated the duty of tolerating the Jews. When Sheikh Raslan died he was buried where his shrine stands, but his soul has no rest, and being now in the condition of a lost spirit he seeks to injure and molest the Jews quite as much as he sought to benefit them when he was in the body. Thus his *gulgól*, or wraith, has been known to waylay a Jewish funeral and make the corpse so heavy by his settling upon it that it became impossible for the bearers to carry it to the burial ground till a Rabbi from Jerusalem, who fortunately happened to be present, pronounced an adjuration which compelled Sheikh Raslan's sprite to promise never to repeat the trick."

"On another occasion the lost Rabbi's soul took the form of a broken jar lying in the roadside near the shrine. A Jew, who when passing by happened to strike it with his foot, was much surprised to hear it speak to him and tell him that if he took it up and placed it near his door-step it would make him very rich. He did so and, sure enough, every morning found several gold coins on his threshold so that he speedily became wealthy. So impressed was he with this, that, at the spirit's bidding, he took it into his house; first of all he kept it hidden in a box, and then, in accordance with its directions, placed it in a cupboard with glass doors before which he had a lamp burning day and night. His wealth, the gift of the devil he had taken into his dwelling, became very great. He would probably have eventually been led by the potsherd to worship it, had not another Jerusalem Rabbi, whom he had invited to be his guest, detected the evil source of his riches and succeeded in persuading him to break the jar to small pieces and grind them to powder, which he scattered to the four winds of heaven. As a result his wealth diminished as rapidly as it had accumulated and he became very poor. His Jewish brethren in Damascus and other places however, at the instigation of the Rabbi, sent him enough

pecuniary help to enable him and his family to live in comfort all their days."

At the end of July I removed with my family to Blûdan, a mountain village in the Anti-Libanus, about thirty miles north-west of Damascus and, as was ascertained some years ago by the late Prof. West (see *Quarterly Statement* for April, 1891, p. 150), about 5,140 feet above sea-level. The village, situated high above the beautiful plain of Zebedâni, is described by Murray (p. 525) as "picturesquely situated—vineyards clinging to the steep acclivities; apricots and walnuts, olives and almond trees, blending beautifully their variously tinted foliage; hedges of white roses winding out and in among the trees and lining the narrow lanes; and rills of limpid water leaping and murmuring wherever we turn. The noble view it commands adds to the attractions of this mountain village."

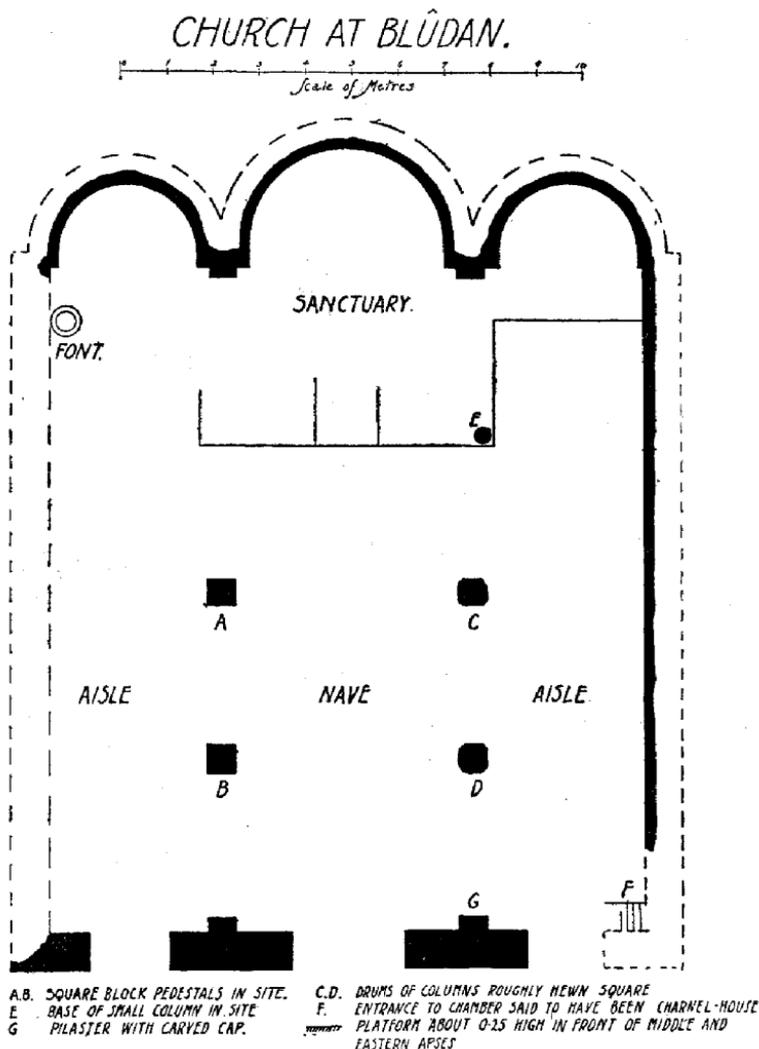
When I came here I took it for granted that the whole district around the village had been thoroughly explored and described, and was therefore agreeably surprised to discover, a day or two after my arrival, that there were many things of interest of which I previously was ignorant, and to which I would venture to call attention. I have indeed been told, since I came here, that the late Prof. S. Ives Curtiss spent some time at Blûdan and described its antiquities, but I have not yet had an opportunity of reading his book, and the observations and notes I now offer are the records of my own impressions unbiassed by previous reading. This, of course, will lessen their value, but such as they are, I crave the reader's kind indulgence for them.¹

The threshing-floors of the village are situated to the south of it, and going there the day after my arrival in order to get a photograph of people using the "*norej*," or threshing-sledge, I was surprised to find that the threshing was going on close to, and amongst the ruins of a Byzantine convent. Its name, as one of the villagers told me was "Deir Mar Jirius," and it had been destroyed by El Melek ed-Dhaher many hundred years ago. It therefore dates back to the thirteenth century.

I forward herewith a sketch plan, drawn to scale, of the old church which occupies the north-east corner of the ruin. The interior space was, as the peasant above referred to told me, cleared

¹ [See CURTISS, *Primitive Semitic Religion To-day*, pp. 44, 46, 82, 259.—*Ed.*]

about the middle of last century by the Christians of Blûdan, and they hoped that with the assistance of the Patriarch of Antioch, resident at Damascus, it would have been rebuilt; but the



massacres of 1860 put a stop to the design and it has lain desolate ever since. However, on the Feast of St. George they assemble here, repair the rustic altar with some of the loose stones lying

about, and the village priest holds a "Kūddas" or "Eucharistic" service and baptizes infants in the ancient font shown on plan.¹ The apses, partly rebuilt with loose stone, but roofless, are clearly seen, and two of the entrance gates, but the latter are in a very rickety condition and I should not wonder if the storms of next

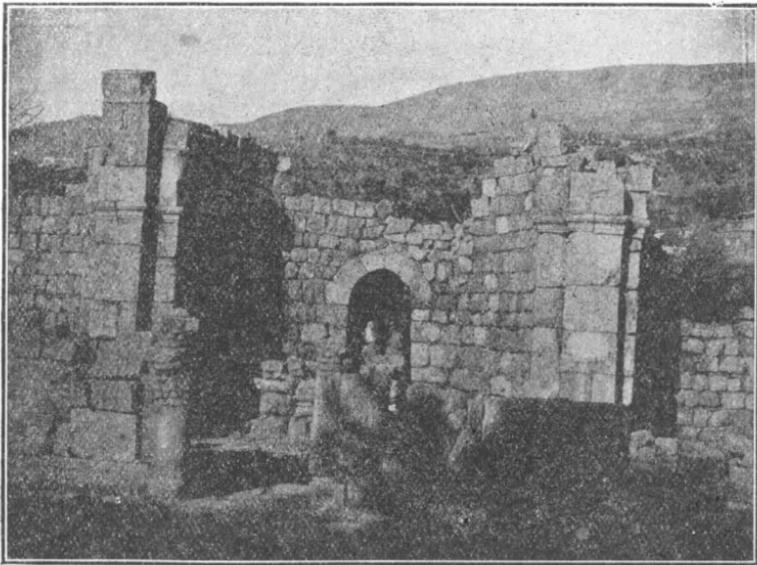
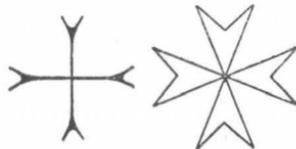


Fig. 1.—Church at Blûdan, showing rustic Altar and Hearth.

winter bring down the pointed arch of the greater one. As there were several things that seemed curious about this church I not only took measurements, but also some photographs. Meanwhile, I would note in the first place that it seemed strange to me to see well-defined crosses of the Order of St. John, with the eight points cut not only on several small mediaeval capitals, but also on lintels, a pilaster cap, and other well-hewn stones, in the church, and elsewhere amongst the ruins (Fig. 2). Is it possible that the Hospitallers had an establishment scarcely thirty miles distant from Damascus, and actually dominating the road past Zebedany? Another point that



¹ The water for baptism is heated on the hearth-recess shown in Fig. 1 behind the rustic altar in the central apse.

struck me was that the church, though now in ruins, seems to have been several times destroyed and roughly rebuilt with large stones taken from some more ancient edifice. Thus the plan shows that the square piers A and B were part of the original church, whereas C and D were simply fragments of columns, originally

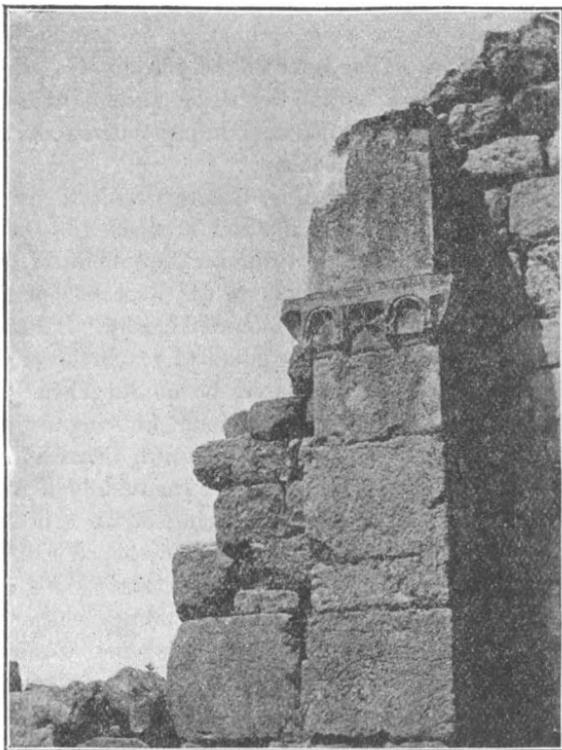


Fig. 2.—Church at Blúdan. Pilaster with carved cap.

about three feet in diameter, which had been very roughly squared and made to do duty in order to match the well-squared A and B.¹ As a result, the spaces between the piers A and C, and B and D, were five centimetres different. There were, besides, other marks of a lack of symmetry. Being curious to know where

¹ These piers A and B are 72 centimetres square. Some column-shafts, originally cylindrical, had been hewn into an octagonal form for use in the church.

the great building which furnished large stones and columns for the church had stood I made special enquiries and was directed to a garden just on the western verge of the village and bearing the startling name of Bustān Bacchus (بستان بآخض). A ruin, of which only a few courses of one corner still remain, had, I was told, furnished the hewn stones and fragments of columns, which I had observed not only in the church, but also in garden gates and houses in the village. The owner of the garden also informed me that when digging here he had found an ancient wine-press and a large cistern close by. He had also dug up entire some large jars, but they were afterwards broken up.

By kind invitation of the Rev. Stuart Cranford my youngest son and I joined him and party on a visit to Deir Yūnan (pronounced locally "Yunon"), a ruin on the summit of one of the highest peaks of Anti-Libanus and on the west side of the valley running up north from Blūdān (pronounced locally "Bludon"¹). It took us the greater part of two hours to reach the pass west of 'Ain Mū'allaka and just above the village of Sūrghaya. We were here fully 2,000 feet higher than Blūdān. Leaving our animals in the pass, we climbed the end of the hill south of us and in about ten minutes reached the summit. It was the middle of August and I was surprised to find reaping still going on at 'Ain Mū'allaka. The remains on the top of the house-gable shaped ridge of Deir Yūnan belonged to at least two different periods. We first came to a great, square, and entirely ruined building which had been constructed of stones of different sizes, some few about 18 inches cube, but most of the others about 3 feet and upward. Amongst those heaped at the south-east corner I was shown a small pedestal about 3 feet high. On one side it has an inscription so weathered that it was impossible to copy it or even to tell what language the letters belonged to. Mr. Cranford tells me that last year he found and removed to the Museum of the Beirut College a stone bearing about half of an inscription in Greek, of a rather late date. Unfortunately he did not remember the exact year, but was under the impression that it was of the fourth Christian century. At the south-west corner of the ruin is the mouth of a cistern closed with a large block of stone, and close to this a stone which had

¹ Exactly like the English words "blue dawn." Yūnan would be thus represented in English spelling "you nawn."

formed part of a cornice. It was 1.42 metres long and ornamented with flowers carved in the intervals between five projections suggestive of ends of rafters. These projections were all, with one exception, mutilated. The one which had not its surface broken was weather-worn and seemed to have traces of a rosette. I am under the impression that "metopes" would be the proper word to describe these projections. The lower portion of the block was buried amongst stones. In a depression or valley head a few yards to the south of the first ruin is another, evidently more ancient, and built of much larger and well-hewn stones from four to seven feet cube, all piled up in confusion. It had probably served as the quarry from which those in the first building had been taken. Just west of it, in an enclosure with ruined walls, is a large well-squared stone about 6 feet square and 3 feet high, which seemed to have served as an altar. At its foot, amongst the chippings on the western side, my boy picked up a bronze arrow-head that was lying on the surface. A circular basin cut in a rough stone, and having a drainhole, stands beside the larger stone. Behind and higher than this supposed altar stone, and a few yards south-west of it and on the very top of the peak, are the remains of a solid platform of well-hewn stone reaching quite to the edge of the precipices overhanging the deep valley through which, several thousand feet below, runs the Damascus-Beirut Railway. This platform seemed to be built on top of two others formed either of Cyclopean masonry, or simply broken rock terraces one above the other: which it was I could not determine. On the uppermost platform are strewn what seem to be the remains of an altar built of hewn stones of large size. One of these, broken across, was once part of a shallow four-sided trough that perhaps was part of the altar table. This fragment was about 2 feet 6 inches square. Another large block close by had a carving as if for the corner moulding of a great door-way hewn into it. If the structure on the platform was not an altar, I can only suggest that it may have been a beacon hearth. I have been told by natives that before the installation of the electric telegraph, half a century ago, the Druzes on the Hauran and Lebanon respectively informed each other of important movements by signal fires on Hermon and Jebel Şunnîn, and in like manner the Government had watch-towers in view of each other on prominent heights from which the approach of a Bedouin raiding party could be announced to the country-side in time for the

inhabitants of endangered villages to seek a place of safety. The Rev. Stuart Cranford, who corroborated this information, tells me that Deir Yûnan is in direct view from the Cedars, and that some years ago, when Prof. West was determining the altitudes of various peaks on the Anti-Libanus, he and a party from the Beyrout College, who by a pre-concerted arrangement were encamped at the Cedars, successfully signalled to each other one night with flash-lights.

The mention of signalling reminds me of something else which I have observed nowhere but in Damascus, and which, as I forgot to speak of it in my preceding notes on that place, may very well come in here. Being one day on the roof of a house overlooking a considerable part of the city, I was surprised to see a pole with a cloth or piece of old sacking suddenly rise above one of the neighbouring roofs and being waved violently to and fro. Thinking this to be a signal of some sort I looked around, and, sure enough, over other roofs in different directions I saw other pieces of cloth being waved. This roused my curiosity and on mentioning it to an acquaintance I was surprised to learn that the waving of the cloths was carried on by pigeon-breeders in order to prevent their flights of decoy-doves from returning to their cotes before the proper hour for feeding, when they generally bring birds belonging to other cotes with them. The strangers are then secured by the pigeon-breeder and kept imprisoned till they have made nests of their own, after which there is no fear of their returning to their first owners. When I remarked that such a procedure was dishonest, I was told that nobody in Damascus thought it so, and that it was a well-established custom, "you may lose a couple of birds to-day, and gain three to-morrow, just as in trade you must expect to gain or lose." When I remarked that I considered this use of decoy-birds in order to lure away those of one's neighbour a shameful trick, I was told that the Damascenes are notorious for their craft and wiles, the reason being, as is popularly said, that "when Iblis first started on his career of mischief he took with him, by way of a stock in trade, seven sacks filled with all kinds of frauds, deceits and stratagems. Six of these sacks he disposed of to the people of Damascus, leaving only one sack to be distributed in other parts of the world."

To return to Blûdan. The district seems to be rich in remains of classic and pagan times, and I greatly regretted my inability to

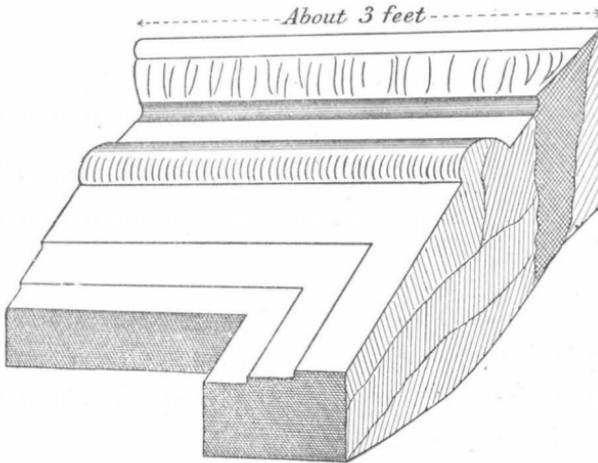
visit each in turn. In the valley north-west of the village and forty minutes' walk distant, descending all the way (it takes a much longer time to climb back), are the ruins of a small building of the Greek or Roman period. Only the lowest courses on the east and south are still *in situ*. On the east it is 10 metres long and formed of stones, all of which are 27 inches thick and several of them 6 feet long. On the south the side consists of one great monolith, 6·70 metres long. It is indeed now broken through in several places, but the fractures show it to have been originally one stone. In the middle of it is a cutting marking the doorway and threshold,



Fig. 3—Steps at Deir Inḥaseh.

3·50 metres wide. Just inside is a landing 2·11 metres long and 0·90 metre wide. It is either rock or the top of a great boulder, and from it five steps lead downwards into the earth. Possibly there may be a sepulchral chamber at the bottom, but it would need a good deal of work to discover it. Somebody had been digging here some time before our visit, and we found the fresh hard clods of caked red earth heaped in the middle of the ruins. The building seems too small for a temple. Perhaps it was a mausoleum. That it had been destroyed by an earthquake was evident from the way in which the massive and originally monolithic

lintel-stone had been flung to the opposite end of the edifice and now lies overturned across the ruin at its northern side. The broken gate-posts lie at right angles to it, along the eastern wall, one inside, the other outside the latter. I measured one broken fragment. It was 9 feet long. The gate, when entire, was, I think, from 12 to 15 feet in height. The accompanying rough sketch will give an idea of the general ornamentation of the gate. It represents a fragment of the great lintel, about 3 feet long. There was a sort of ledge or shelf over the doorway such as are seen in modern European-built houses in Palestine. The ruin, situated not more than two or three hundred yards from the railway-line, is called "Deir Inhaseh," or "Copper Convent," because, as some peasant



boys on the spot told us, a copper vessel was, some years ago, dug up here and afterwards sold in Damascus. On the top of a low foot-hill about a quarter of a mile to the north and beyond a line of small fountains gushing from the sloping terrace at the base of the overhanging mountain towering to the east are the ruins of an ancient village, known only as El Khorbeh, "the ruin." Round its eastern, southern, and northern sides are many large boulders. They must have fallen from the cliffs above many centuries ago. That they are so old is proved by the ancient graves sunk into their upper surfaces. I photographed one of these boulders, not so much because it contained three such graves side by side, as because a few yards in front of, *i.e.*, west of it, are the broken fragments of

a great threshold (or perhaps lintel), much worn, but seemingly *in situ*. We could detect no other traces of the large building to which this originally belonged. At the north-east corner of the ruins there is another huge boulder, about 20 feet high, and having at its south-west corner, but facing south, a small niche about 2 feet 6 inches high, and apparently intended to receive a small statue. We searched amongst the surrounding stones for fragments of this idol, but in vain. We noticed a good deal of old pottery, apparently Roman-Greek, and besides, fossils of exactly the same

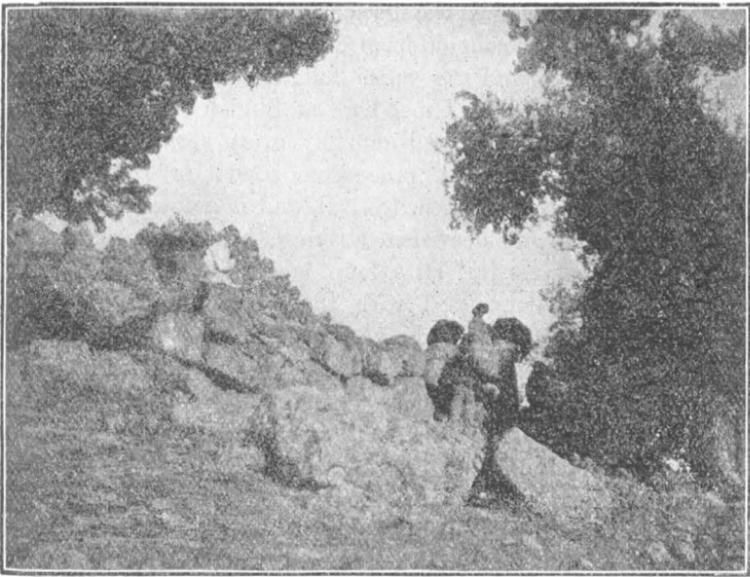


Fig. 4.—South Side of the terrace at the “Mother of Potsherd.”

form and kind as those abounding in Judea, at Bettir, Neby Samuel, etc., and saw a great many clumps of what seemed iron ore, and ferruginous sandstone.

Besides Roman-Greek there are antiquities of a much older character in the district. I have been told of a great stone which is said to be worshipped by the Moslem fellahin at Neby ‘Abdân, near Zebedâni, and on a steep hill-side about one mile south of Blûdan, I visited a makâm, or sacred place, called “El ‘Arejja Om Esh-Shakakîf,” or “the Little Lame Mother of Potsherd.” The place consists of an artificial three-sided terrace built up with large

stones and having on its top at the western end a stone circle, the rough blocks composing which are 60 centimetres high on an average. Only the western part of the circle is recognizable, the eastern being apparently buried under accumulated rubbish and broken pottery. A grove of old oak trees overshadows the whole. The place derives its name from the sherds of *new* jars lying about. It is visited by Christian as well as Moslem women from the villages in the surrounding district who break *new* jars in fulfilment of vows. Old jars are not acceptable to the female saint who is worshipped here. I was gravely informed that on one occasion a woman from Zebedâni, at the foot of the hill, offered a new jar but did not break it as she should have done, and was surprised, when she went home, to find the vessel follow her of its own accord. A missionary lady whom I met here at Blûdan told me that this grove and platform is visited annually every spring by religious processions. The Moslem procession resembles that seen at Jerusalem at the Neby Mousa festival, and is accompanied by the same show of dancing dervishes, striking themselves with knives. This processional festival lasts four days, according to a native informant, and is connected with the ceremony known as the "Da'aseh" (دعسة), when a holy Sheikh rides over the prostrate bodies of a crowd of fanatic Moslems. It visits in turn a place called "El Khan," another named "Kursi El-Melek," which I shall presently speak of more particularly, and passes "the Lame Mother of Potsherds" on its way to the shrine of Neby 'Abdân above mentioned. I suspect that the breaking of unused earthen vessels by females at Om Esh-Shakâkif may be the survival of some ancient form of gross nature worship, such as that of Mylitta or Astarte, and the jars shattered symbols of the nameless sacrifices connected with the impure ritual.

On the slope of another hill about six miles (two hours' ride) from Blûdan, and in full view, not only from thence but also from every part of the Zebedâni Valley and the hills on either side of it, is another old monument of primitive heathen worship. It consists of a huge rock-pinnacle perched on the very edge of the precipices bordering a sort of hill-bastion or terrace, situated a couple of thousand feet at least above the village Medaya. It towers, as seen at a distance, like a great reddish and grey obelisk or conical pillar, dominating the wide valley below. I was struck by its appearance when I caught the first glimpse of it, a few minutes

after the train from Damascus had left the station at et-Tekieh, and my interest was increased when, on enquiry, I learnt that it is known all over the country-side by the most suggestive name of "Kursi el-Melek" or "Chair of the King." "Chair of Moloch" would be an equally correct rendering. This landmark is surrounded by a grove of sacred oaks and connected with a smoke-blackened cave where a lamp is kept burning all night. To it the Moslem peasants bring offerings of oil to propitiate the favour of the "weli," or "saint," whose presence haunts it, and who has shown himself now and then to men even, in the form of a huge snake. Other names for this site are "Ayat el-Kursi" *i.e.*, "the Sign of the Chair," and "Kela'at el-Kursi," or "Boulder of the Chair." It is also sometimes called "Kursi en-Nebi," "Chair of the Prophet," because the Moslems of the district are popularly said to believe that the founder of their religion sits there as president of the nocturnal séances of his ancient companions, the "Sohabah." This interesting information was given me by the Rev. Stuart Cranford and other people at Blûdan. I made a point of visiting the place and took photographs of the great stone, both as seen from a distance and close at hand. On getting near it I found that the "Kursi," when viewed from the south-east, somewhat resembles a huge arm-chair, hence its name. It is fully 4 metres in height, not counting the precipice on the very edge of which it is perched with its back to the Zebedâni plain. When seen from the west and north, therefore, it looks like a great cone or obelisk, as above stated.

There are two roads from Blûdan to Ayat el-Kursi. The upper one, we were told, is steep and stony, so we took the lower one. Leaving the village on our left, we descended southward for half an hour to 'Ain Kibri. Just before reaching it we passed on the right the ruins of a village of the same name, and by the roadside under, and around a great tree, the ruins known as Mar Elias. The traces of the foundations of a building with the outlines of an apse can be made out. There were also building-stones and the shaft of an eight-sided column. Inside the apse was a curious modern "makâm," or sacred place. It consisted of a circular enclosure of loosely piled stones. The space enclosed was about 4 feet in diameter, not more, and the wall about 2 feet high. This spot is directly beneath the "Mother of Potsberds," and west of the latter. Our donkey drivers told us that people, when any of their relatives are sick, etc., etc., often vow to light a lamp here

overnight in case of their recovery, or on their safe return from a journey, etc. Still descending from el-Kibri, we crossed about five minutes later the copious stream coming from "Ain el-Jarjonieh." The source, we were told, is at the further end of a cave so deep that it would take one half an hour to reach its end.

From "el-Jarjonieh" the ascent begins, gradual at first till, having passed the village of Ibķin, we reached Imdāya, or Medaya. The villagers were busy here, as also at Blūdan, in preparing provisions for the winter. The house-tops were covered with boiled wheat laid out to dry before being ground into *būrghūl*, sliced tomatoes were spread on boards for the same purpose, and beside the house-doors and under the trees groups of peasant women were gossiping, whilst all the while each was busy stuffing leaves of poplar, vine and mulberry into the mouth of a black fat-tailed sheep that crouched beside her, and was being fattened in order, before the cold weather sets in, to be killed and boiled down in its own fat into "*Kawārmā*" for winter food. From Imdāya the ascent to El-Kursi is very steep, and on our returning we were glad to walk down the hill rather than ride. Whilst passing through the village we noticed an old monolithic gate-post, about 5 feet in height, upright in the ground just outside the corner of a modern house, and a little further on a fragment of a good-sized column with traces of an inscription. As the sun was just setting we could not stop to examine this more closely. Two letters, a Π and an Η, were all we could make out, the rest of the writing being buried. It was dark when we got back to Blūdan. The journey to the Kursi took us two and a half hours, the return, one and three quarters.

Since writing the foregoing notes on the ruined church at Blūdan, the Greek village-priest, who is desirous to get it re-built and a school-house adjoining it, and who has already collected about forty pounds for this object, related the following legend which, he says, is current in the district and connected with the church and convent.

"A man of Blūdan happening to cross a field was attacked by a fierce bull. Being sore pressed he snatched up a stone and dashed it with all his force against the creature. It broke through the animal's ribs and out at the other side, killing the beast on the spot. Astonished at the result of the blow, the owner of the bull picked up and examined the stone with which the bull had been killed. He found that it was a sharp jewel (جوهر *sic*) and took it

down to Zebedâni, where it was made into a sword-blade so trenchant that its owner became irresistible in warfare. He became finally an emir of the district and left his sword as an heirloom in the family. One of his descendants, however, having murdered a man, was pursued by the whole male population of Zebedâni, and fled to the church and convent of Mar Jirius seeking sanctuary. As the monks refused to give him up to the clamouring multitude, the latter sacked and destroyed both church and monastery. What became of the wonderful weapon no one knows."

The annual pilgrimage to Saidnaya took place during the last week of our stay at Blûdan. I did not visit the place. It is described in Murray's *Guide* (1868, p. 466-7). The following legend, related to me by a Damascene, is not given by Murray.

"The Emperor Justinian when hunting in the district north of Damascus caught sight of a snow-white gazelle with golden horns. He immediately gave chase to it, but it successfully eluded pursuit, and finally led the hunter to the spot where the church of Saidnaya now stands. There it stopped and was suddenly transformed. Instead of the gazelle the emperor beheld the Virgin, who commanded him to erect the church to her honour." One is tempted to wonder whether the legend conceals a yet older one, possibly connected with Diana or Artemis.

From the preceding notes it is clear that there is a great deal of folk-lore current in the Damascus district. I have not yet visited Helbon. Its people have a reputation for being very silly, and I find that the stories told to illustrate this greatly resemble those related of the people of Deir Es-Sinneh, near Siloam. One of these, about the moon, is identical with that related in *Tales Told in Palestine*, p. 337, but has a different sequel.

I enclose two photographs of a curious slab of basalt lying in front of a house door not far from the Victoria Hospital. It is about 3 feet square. I at first thought it might have been the top of an altar, but close examination showed that the hollows, now full of earth, go right through the slab. No one knows where it came from. It was placed there by the man who built the house over thirty years ago. Was it, perhaps, a perforated window?

In the hedges at Blûdan I noticed a thorn-bush which I have not seen elsewhere. The natives call the curious seed-vessels "plates of the ghouls" (صحون الغيلن).¹

¹ The plant is "Christ's Thorn" (*Paliurus aculeatus*).

P.S.—At the risk of being thought trivial and fanciful I would call attention to the curious resemblance between some of the names mentioned in the preceding notes and certain well-known mythological ones. Thus with Deir Jûnon compare Juno, with Bustân Bacchus compare Bacchus, and with Imdâya or Medaya compare Medea. 'Ain Jarjonieh, meaning "Well of the place of Jarjon," or the female Jarjon, closely resembles Gorgon. Blûdan, at first, suggested Pluto, as the Arabs do not pronounce the letter *p*, but perhaps the name is the plural of Blota, which in the dialect of Malula signifies a district (*Quarterly Statement*, 1890, p. 97). Just above Blûdan is a fountain "'Ain Hâzir," which seems to mean "Well of the riddle-solver." The water is said to be medicinal. Was there perhaps an oracle or something of the sort connected with it in ancient times? Finally, I may mention that among the people of Blûdan and the Zebedâni district generally, there is said to be in common use a most abominable expletive which, though Arabic, is identical in meaning with an obscene expression habitually used by low-class Italian navvies and Neapolitan artisans. This information, if correct, would seem to add one more fact to the evidence for the former existence in this part of Syria of gross nature-worship of which the processions at the vernal equinox (above, p. 134) may be a remnant.

RAUWOLFF'S TRAVELS IN PALESTINE, 1573.

By R. A. STEWART MACALISTER, M.A., F.S.A.

(Continued from *Q.S.*, 1908, p. 141.)

WE need not reproduce Rauwolfo's description of the officialdom of the country he is describing—it is on the whole very much like what a modern follower of our traveller would write. The abolition, or rather suspension, of capital punishment in the modern regime fortunately prevents such gruesome scenes as this:—"By them [the "Soubashaws"] are examined all criminal matters, and they have "power to examine and put to the torture all malefactors, to make "them confess their crimes. They also accompany the malefactors