

TOPOGRAPHY

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“The Sidonian plain is of the highest fertility and produces the finest fruit of Syria”, G. Rawlinson, 1889, *History of Phoenicia*, London, p. 12.

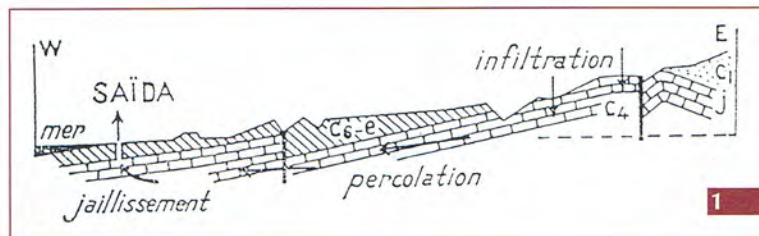
The long and narrow maritime plain bordering the Lebanon mountains, from which flow the streams that water it, can be divided into smaller and convenient sections. These include the plain of Acco, the plain of Tyre, the plain of Sidon etc...The Sidon plain, which is overlooked for the most part by low laying hills, was ideally suited for the cultivation of the vine, the olive and the mulberry trees which made up the bulk of local traditional industry. As the height of the hills increases, cultivation ceases, and the vineyard region is succeeded by a tract of wild mountain-land, in part bare, in part covered with woodland.

“La plaine environnante, arrosée par le “gracieux Bostren”(Nahr el-Aoualy), est couverte de jardins dont la beauté avait fait donner à la ville le nom de Sidon la fleurie”, G. Charmes, 1891, *Voyage en Syrie*, Paris, p. 66.

...“A quatre heures, je franchis le nahr Sanik, qui tarit souvent en été... à quatre heures vingt-cinq minutes, je traverse le Nahr el-Barrhout; il ne roule en ce moment qu’un faible filet d’eau dans son lit presque entièrement desséché”, V. Guérin, 1880, *Description géographique historique et archéologique de la Palestine*, 3, Galilée, tome. 1.2, Paris, p. 487.

Sidon was famous as a city of gardens that stretched out to the rocky foothills. The surrounding region does not include any permanent rivers flowing to the sea. Instead the narrow fertile littoral of Sidon is watered by the rivers from the mountains, the el-*Awali* river to the north, the ancient Bostrenus and the Seynik river to the south. The el-*Awali* river (fig. 2) takes its water from the Jurassic and Cretaceous high mountains. Other scattered springs

however emerge in the sandstone and argillous sandstone remains from the Lower Cretaceous layers¹.



The narrow littoral of Sidon is also remarkable for its sub-artesian waters. Dubertret reports in 1949² that the American Mission was able to obtain water in the centre of the old town of Sidon by reaching under the limestone of the Middle Eocene, the marls of the Senonien and the split and aquiferous limestone from the Cretaceous layers. Nowadays many Sidonians resort to digging their own wells in the centre of the city. Water does not gush out but remains at about 10 m from the surface. It is then pumped out from the wells (fig. 1).

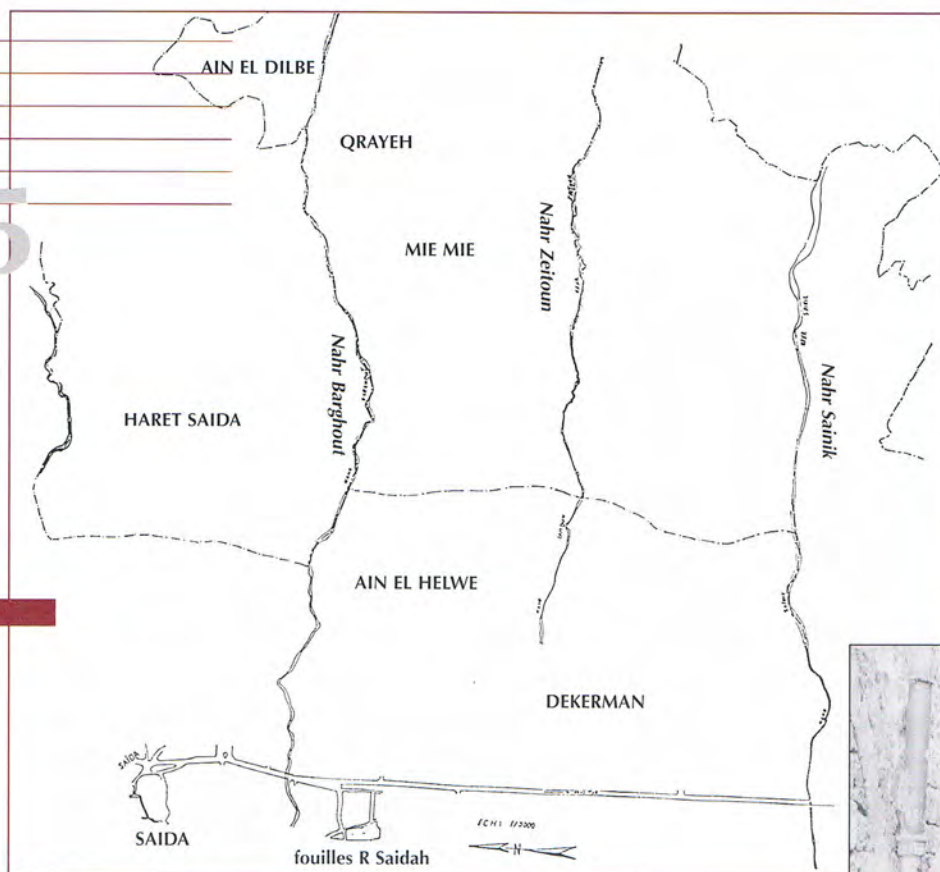
“We have had a delightful ramble along the aqueduct and through the vast fruit-orchards, and my respect for old Sidon has decidedly risen by the excursion”, W. H. Thomson, 1877, *The Land and the Book*, London, p.108.

Historically the city’s water supply was brought to Sidon by an aqueduct which originated at the el-*Awali* river. Canals running from the river tra-



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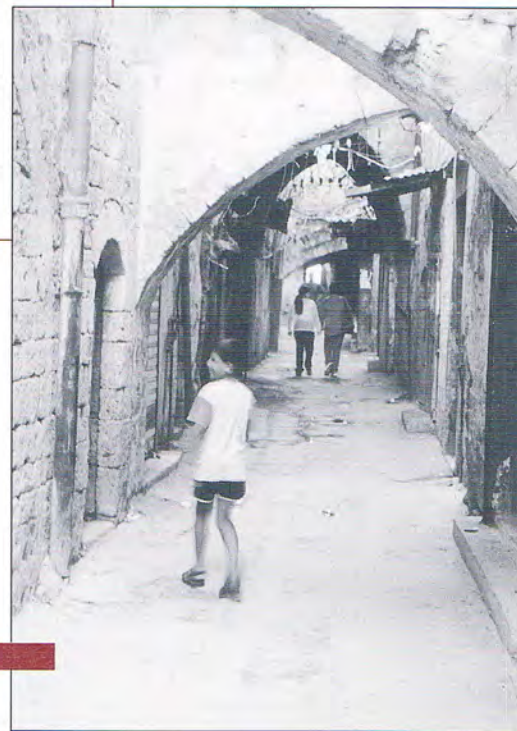
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velled through rock-cut and stone covered trenches alternating with tunnels that followed the curb of the mountain from Eshmun to Sidon. It was suggested that part of this aqueduct dated back as early as the Persian period³.

“A walled town, closely pent up within its narrow limits. A more compact city could hardly be imagined, for not only are the streets too narrow to allow loaded camels to pass each other with facility, but the houses are to a great extent

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built on arches over the streets, so that one can ride or walk from one end of the town to the other under dark, gloomy tunnels...”. Colonel Sir Charles W. Wilson, 1800, *Picturesque Palestine Sinai and Egypt*, III, London, p. 43.

1 M. Dubertret, 1949, *Carte géologique au 50. 000e, feuille de Saïda*, Beyrouth, p. 37, 38.

2 *ibid.*

3 H. Frost, 10 March, 1964, *logbook*, p. 178.

- 1 The sub-artesian waters on the littoral of Sidon (from Dubertret, 1949)
- 2 The el-Awali river to the north of the city
- 3 Map showing the main rivers of Sidon (R. Zarzour)
- 4 Sidon's old souk

TOPOGRAPHY Sidon or Saïda (33 34' N, 35 22' E)⁴ is situated on the NW slope of a rocky promontory.

According to an urban plan drawn-up by Dr. Gaillardot and published by Ernest Renan⁵ in 1864, the city included ramparts and two castle forts. The first

forms an acropolis on a nearby tell overlooking the city. This is known as Kalaat el Mezze or Castle of Saint Louis (Louis IX in 1253) so-called because it was believed that the King of France visited it⁶. The second, a sea castle, was built by the Crusaders during the winter of 1227-1228 on an offshore rock linked to the mainland by a 70 m bridge. One author, V. Guérin⁷ in 1880, is alone in describing a building with columns on the offshore rock which pre-existed the sea castle. This building according to Guérin might have been the temple of Melqart, the columns of which were re-used by the Crusaders to built their sea castle.

The harbour

The mainland harbour adjoining the town is limited to the south of Sidon by a rock which is geologically part of the same offshore reef as the island of Sidon. The island is approximately 540m long and lies parallel to and 1km from the coast, opposite Sidon's ancient rock-cut harbour on the mainland.

Sidon's harbour was mentioned in the 2nd century AD by Achilles Tattius⁸, an Alexandrian, the author

of "The loves of Leucippe and Clitophon". Clitophon "a Phoenician from Tyre" describes Sidon's two harbours as joined together; "in one of them the ships may harbour safely in the winter; in the other in the summer: whither by the violence of the tempest being cast". This location of the two harbours (the inner harbour basin sheltered from the sea by a rocky tongue of land, the outer harbour probably the anchorage protected by the island) was disputed by R. Pococke in 1745⁹ who wrongly located the outer harbour in the shallow bay south of the town. It was also mentioned by V. Guérin who in 1880 describes this bay as follows: "the rock-bottom is still there, washed over by very shallow water"¹⁰.

In 1946 and 1950 the port of Sidon became the object of an aerial and underwater study by Poidebard and Lauffray¹¹. This described the mainland harbour as a "closed Phoenician-type harbour" with its sea-defences¹², which were largely rock-cut, being an extension of the city-walls, a harbour that was used to contain the town's own ships while foreign craft lay in the outer, or island harbour.



4 *Mediterranean Pilot (Hydrographic Department) vol. V, The coasts of Libya, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Israel; the Southern Coast of Turkey and the Island of Cyprus*, sixth edition, Great Britain, 1976; F. C. Eiselen, 1907, *Sidon a Study in Oriental History*, New York, p. 3.

5 E. Renan, 1864, *Mission de Phénicie*, pl. LXVI-LXVIII.

6 P. Deschamps, 1939, *La défense du royaume de Jérusalem, des châteaux des Croisés en terre sainte*, II, Paris, p. 226; C. Enlart, 1928, *Monuments des Croisés dans le royaume de Jérusalem, architecture religieuse et civile*, II, Paris, p. 336-337.

7 V. Guérin, 1880, *Description géographique historique et archéologique de la Palestine*, 3, *Galilée*, tome, I.2, Paris, p. 490.

8 A. Tattius, 1638, *The Loves of Clitophon and Leucippe*, Oxford, p. 1, 2-6.

9 R. Pococke, 1745, *A Description of the East and some other Countries*, II, 1, London, p. 86.

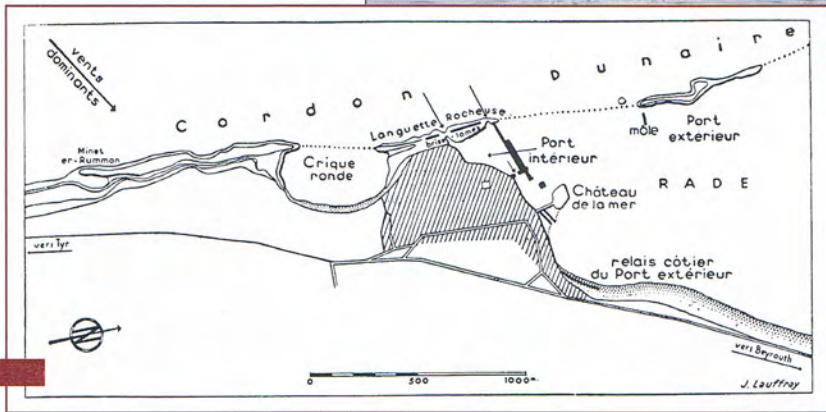
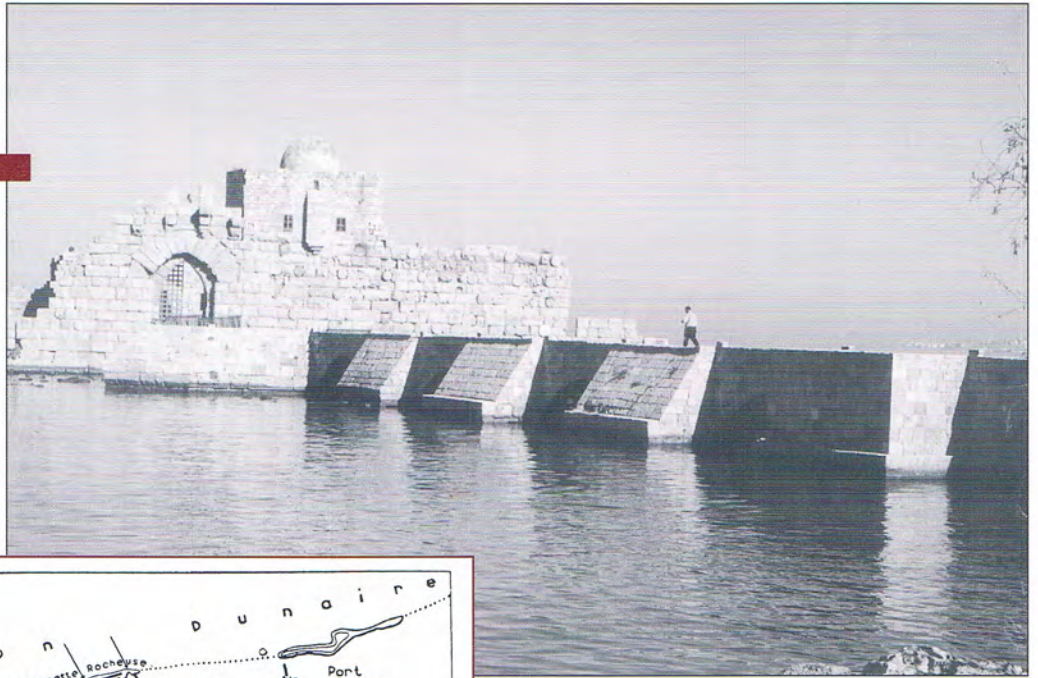
10 V. Guérin, *op cit.*, p. 490.

11 A. Poidebard & J. Lauffray, 1951, *Sidon: Aménagements antiques du port de Saida*, Beyrouth, p. 83-90.

12 G. Rawlinson, 1889, *Phoenicia*, London, p. 46.

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- 5 The land castle of Sidon (St Louis castle)
- 6 Crusader sea castle of Sidon
- 7-8 Plan of Sidon's harbour by A. Poidebard and J. Lauffray, 1951
- 9 Sidon's harbour, 1998

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