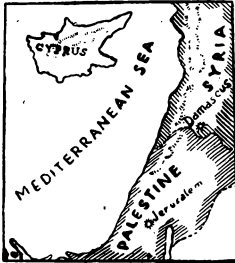


HISTORY SECTION

THE OLDEST CITY IN THE WORLD



Location of Damascus

BEFORE Athens was built, before Rome was built, before Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt, Damascus, "the pearl of the desert,"

was a great and famous city, and it is still the chief city of Syria.

This interesting old metropolis is believed to be the oldest inhabited city in the world. The first mention of Damascus is in Egyptian records of about 4,000 years ago, and we can trace its continuous existence for that length of time.

About this city of romance many historic memories cluster. It was taken by the Israelites under King David in B. C. 1040, and later by the Assyrians in B. C. 704. From A. D. 635 down to the time of the first World War the city was in Arabian and Turkish hands, except for a short time when it was held by the Crusaders in the 12th century.

Christians will recall that Saint Paul, one of the famous characters of early Christianity, was associated with Damascus. While on his way to Damascus to persecute the Christians, Paul—then called Saul—was miraculously converted to Christianity.

When Paul began his apostolic labors, he returned to Damascus. On account of

his work there, he aroused the hatred of the Jews. In order to escape from the Jews, who plotted to take his life and were watching for him at the gates of the city, he was let down from the city wall at night, and then proceeded to Jerusalem. The identical place of the wall where Paul was lowered in a basket is pointed out by guides. (See the illustration on page 299.)

This ancient city is located in a plain at the foot of the mountains of Syria one hundred and thirty-three miles north of Jerusalem. (See the map on this page.) The city can rightfully boast of unusual charm and beauty, especially when seen from a distance. The river Barada, called Abana in the Bible, flows through its streets, and irrigates copiously the city's extensive gardens, bringing life and plenty to all.

The suburbs of the city are beautiful, owing their fertility almost entirely to the river. Seen from the brow of the high hill close by, the white, smokeless city, set within a verdure of green, looks almost celestial. There are, indeed, few places on earth where so rich a variety of fruits and nuts is brought to maturity within a similar area.

To the Arab, Damascus is the most beautiful city in the world, and on it he patterns his idea of Paradise, for it lies in a lovely green plain on the edge of the Syrian desert, and its gardens yield oranges, lemons, citrons, pomegranates, mulberries, figs, plums, walnuts, pears, apples, and cucumbers to the limit of his dreams.

No city is more Oriental in appearance

than Damascus. From a distance its great expanse of low-lying Arab houses, overtopped here and there by the graceful minarets of the mosques, seems very picturesque. When you come nearer, you find that the streets are narrow and crooked and dirty, and the houses are very dingy and dilapidated.

But the mud fronts of some of these houses and their grated windows with red shutters give no indication of the luxury of some of the interiors, where you find rich rugs and draperies, striped divans, and marble-paved courts with fountains.

Damascus is a sacred city to the followers of the Mohammedan religion, and in the 12th month of every Mohammedan year thousands of persons of this religious belief gather at this city for the pilgrimage to

Mecca, a journey which every follower of the prophet Mohammed hopes to make at least once in a lifetime.

The life of this merchant city of the desert centers in the *khans* and *bazaars*. The "great *khan*," with its Moorish gate and its black and white marble cupola supported by granite pillars, is a magnificent structure. In this and in lesser *khans* (walled caravan headquarters) trading goes on in a cool twilight to the pleasant sound of fountains.

The *bazaars* of Damascus are noisier and busier than the *khans*. The *bazaars* are simply streets of very small shops where bright silks, rugs, metal work, fruits, roast meats, confections sweetened with honey and grape syrup, shoes, cloth, and other articles are temptingly displayed.

Each kind of goods has a street or a part of a street to itself. The longest and busiest *bazaar* of all—the "Straight

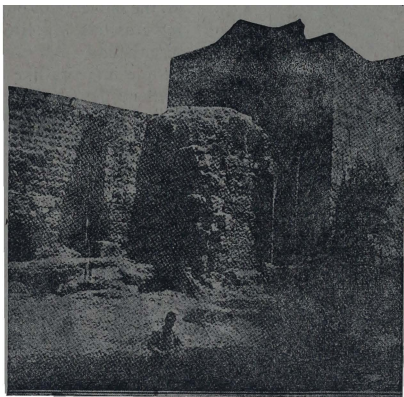
Street" mentioned in connection with Saint Paul's conversion to Christianity—is roofed for its whole length of a mile and a half, and, as seen from some minaret, looks like a great lead pipe traversing the city.

The looms of Damascus have been famous for many centuries; and in this city, where everything is still done in the primitive

way, where meal is ground in stone mills turned by camels, you may see the hand looms worked by a weaver.

Through all her history, Damascus has been the meeting place and the mart of nations. Through Damascus passed great caravans from the desert to the sea coast.

In spite of all its vicissitudes, Damascus, the oldest city in the world, still holds first place among the cities of Syria, and possesses more than any other city "the mysterious spell of the Orient."



Traditional Place of Saint Paul's Escape, Damascus.