

DAMASCUS BELIEVED TO BE OLDEST CITY

City Figuring in Druse Revolution Against French Rule
Has 250,000 Mohammedan Inhabitants.

By William Phillip Simms

Damascus, figuring in the news as the scene of bloody fighting between French rulers and rebelling Druse tribesmen, is believed to be the oldest city in the world.

Said to have been founded by Uz, grandson of Shem, Noah's eldest son, its origin was literally lost in antiquity even when Abraham passed through on his way to Canaan.

Little David, after he became king, slew his 22,000 Syrians near there and made Damascus his general headquarters. And, says the Bible, "the Syrians became servants to David and brought gifts."

Long Fought Over

Time out of mind in the centuries before, Damascus had been besieged, and fought over and captured and recaptured before Paul became converted on the road outside and walked into town down its Street Called Straight.

Jeroboam the Second, took Damascus "for Israel, according to the word of the Lord by Jonah the Prophet." And once its people were carried off to Kir, so Amos tells us. And Rameses II took it. Alexander the Great once bossed it and struck

off coins there with his likeness upon them. After that, Antioch became first city and "Damascus weakened," to use Biblical phrase.

Plundered by Tartars

In the thirteenth century was captured by the Mongols and at the beginning of the fourteenth it was plundered by the Tartars. The Turks took charge of it in 1516 and held it until the World War. Now the French hold it under mandate of the League.

Damascus is just across from Palestine in southern Syria. It is in a circular plain, thirty miles wide and 2,300 feet above the sea, which is about seventy miles away. The Anti-Libanus Mountains rise 1,500 feet above it, bleak and barren; and so is the surrounding country. But the plain of Damascus itself, water as it is by the Abanah, as it is called in Kings (Barada is its name now), is reminiscent of the citrus fruit belt of Southern California—green, pleasant, lovely.

Street Called Straight

"The Pearl of the Desert," Damascus is called, and fruit is so cheap that there is an old saying that in Damascus one can live for nothing. It was against Damascus that the

Crusaders marched and it was they who brought back to Europe those blades of Damascus steel you have heard so much about. It seems that Indian wootz, or carbonized iron, was brought from the region of Golconda, in Hindustan, and at Damascus was hammered into the famous blades. This trade is now dead, as is the damasc business.

City Not Pleasant

But the Street Called Straight which Paul's feet knew and down which King David himself once marched, is still there, a street of bazaars, bustling with business.

The city itself is not as pleasant

as the surrounding plain would lead you to think. About it is a dilapidated wall pierced by seven gates. The streets are narrow, crooked, badly paved and evil of smell. Dung-heaps are in front of nearly every door. Low mud houses are the rule, punctured by small grated windows with red shutters. Now and then, however, there is a better house, built about a courtyard paved with marble, and green with trees and flowers. The interiors of these are gaudy.

There are some 250,000 inhabitants in Damascus now, mostly Mohammedan. There are perhaps 30,000 Christians, including Greeks, and

about 10,000 Jews. The Mohammedan quarter of the city is by far the best; the Christian quarter and Ghetto are rather squalid.

FISH HAVE FINGERS

BRISTOL, England—Fish having rudimentary limbs, terminating in what look like four fingers and a thumb are reported by Lady Richmond Brown, who has been carrying

on deep seas research in the British Honduras.

NAUGHTY PAPA

LONDON.—Arrested for breaking glass in the street, a young man was discharged by the magistrate when police said he had acted in good faith. The youth had seen his parents with a bottle of beer and had broken the bottle.

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