

Science News-Letter

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ARCHÆOLOGY

Ancient Carthage is Scene of Real Estate Boom

By EMILY C. DAVIS

Carthage by the sea—trains for commuters—sea breeze all the year round.

This is the newest way in which proud old Carthage, famous metropolis of the ancient world, is making itself known.

Judging from various kinds of evidence this real estate development is on the same site as the Carthage that was once renowned as the world's wealthiest city. Here was the Carthage of Hannibal and Dido, the city that stood by itself and that held within its borders one of the most wicked and most remarkable civilizations of history.

Carthage of today is gaining local fame as being within thirty minutes of the prosperous, fast growing city of Tunis. Tunis is a low, inland town, oppressively hot in summer, and Carthage is, as real estate dealers like to say, "swept by the fresh sea breezes." With the establishment of fast electric train service, and even "theater trains" late at night, the scene is well set to make the tired business men of Tunis feel that a villa in Carthage is not a luxury but a necessity.

Ground in Carthage is being parceled off into lots for little one-story bungalows and villas. Land is firmly held—and sold—at boom prices. And archaeologists who are attempting to explore systematically the buried past of the city, and who have already made some important finds there, are watching the growth of this twentieth century Carthage with apprehension.

The oldest chapters in the history of this city have always been mysterious and baffling. After Rome conquered the Carthagians in 146 B.C. and razed the city and cursed the soil "that neither house nor cornfield might ever reappear on the spot," a Roman colony was established there within a century. Later it fell to the level of a Vandal base.

Then Belisarius came and made Carthage a Byzantine city, until the Arabs swept it with fire and left it in ruins in 698 A.D.

All this makes an eventful history for any town. But it is the old Punic metropolis which flourished in earlier times, from about the ninth century B.C. down to the terrible burning and destruction by Rome in the year 146 B.C., that stirs the imagination.

There are innumerable traditions and fables about this civilization, but it is only in recent decades that the lonely stretch of land on the North African coast has begun to give up the secrets that are buried under six to fifteen feet of accumulated soil. All the histories of Carthage that we have today were written by her enemies, people who were at war with the African merchants. Archaeologists are especially eager to find out what Carthage would say for herself, on stone tablets and in ruined buildings.

But, now, the initial cost of mak-

ing exploratory excavations to find out where important ruins are located has become practically prohibitive, according to Dr. Francis W. Kelsey, director of the Franco-American Expedition which made excavations at Carthage, under the charter of the Washington Archæological Society, in 1925.

Dr. Kelsey, who is now at the University of Michigan, believes that the site of Carthage should be brought under the control of the French government and should be gradually purchased or taken over by the government.

"It should then be excavated and developed as a great archæological park, under an administration similar to that of Pompeii, Timgad, and other sites properly excavated and opened to the public, he says.

The finds recently made by the Franco-American expedition at this site indicate that there is much more of the old Punic Carthage lying in the depths of the soil than was supposed.

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Carthage today, a suburban town with a buried mystery.

Ancient Carthage

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In a preliminary report of the expedition just issued, Dr. Kelsey suggests that the historic picture of the Romans ploughing the ground of Carthage in token of its utter devastation should not be taken too literally. That is, the ploughing episode was probably confined to a small area and was merely a Roman gesture of the completeness of their conquest.

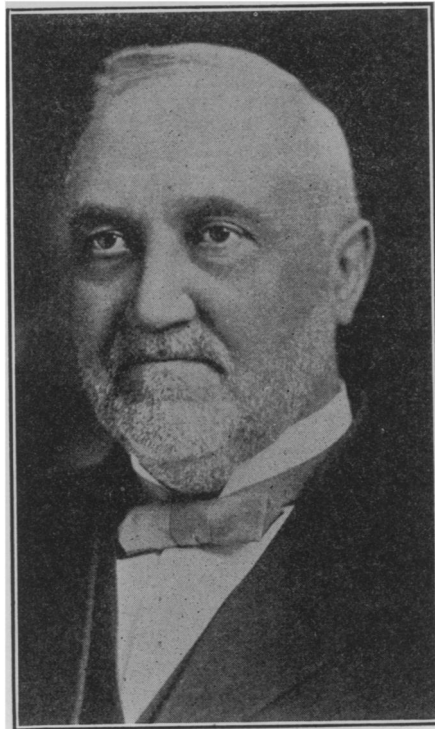
The Carthaginians, he points out, must have worked with tools and mechanical appliances. They were metal workers, potters, and masons, and they probably built their more impressive structures of stone. To destroy completely such a city, with its 700,000 or more inhabitants, would not have been easy, even if it burned seventeen days as historians declare.

After visiting the ruins of the French and Belgian towns in the European War zone, Dr. Kelsey has come to the conclusion that the soldiers of Scipio could not have accomplished such destruction at Carthage as was caused by bombs and shell fire in the great war.

"When the Roman colonists came to the site of the Punic city, twenty-four years or more after the first destruction of Carthage," he says, "they probably found great stretches of jumbled masonry, from three to ten or fifteen feet deep, with flame-scarred walls here and there projecting upwards. The familiar tales about Marius in exile may be in part apocryphal; but even so it is difficult to understand how the story about Marius 'sitting among the ruins of Carthage' could have originated if there were no ruins there."

Evidence which led to the first discovery of the newly excavated Punic remains was gained by chance in 1921. Limestone stelae, or tablets, with symbols and Punic inscriptions on them began to appear in the market of Tunis. Such stelae had been previously found about Carthage, and excavations by archæologists have revealed ruins of the Roman period and some of uncertain age. Interest in all this was so great that any find of Punic relics immediately attracted attention.

A public official in Tunis saw one of the tablets that were being offered for sale, and he at once inquired where it came from. The Arab salesman realized that his profitable business was in danger, and he told of finding the stone at a place some miles from Carthage. His directions led nowhere. So the Arab was followed



DR. FRANCIS W. KELSEY
Archæologist of the University of Michigan,
and director of the Franco-American Expedition to Carthage.

and was found at Carthage, where he was busily digging in a hole. So the famous area which the early Carthaginians had held sacred to the goddess Tanit was discovered.

Since then French and American archæologists and experts on antiquity and ancient languages have excavated and studied a part of the sanctuary area. But so far they have stirred up more puzzles than they have solved. Dr. Kelsey says that he has never visited a site of so limited size which has "yielded so great an abundance of evidence and at the same time increased rather than diminished the difficulties of interpretation."

In the comparatively small area that they have dug out, resembling an excavation for a large deep cellar, the archæologists have in the past season uncovered over 1,100 cinerary urns, rows of dedicatory tablets of stone set there to the goddess, and more than 300 larger stones which resemble altars. The temple ground appears rather like a modern cemetery, and the likeness goes farther than the rows of upright slabs and pillars, for the urns under and beside them contain charred bones of young children and small animals.

It is not definitely known with what rites, terrible or beautiful, the Carthaginian merchants and aristocrats set up these stones and placed these urns there. It is agreed that the

place was sacred to the goddess Tanit, and Dr. Kelsey says it is certain that she was the dominant divinity of Carthage.

This goddess Tanit is represented on the stones by a variety of symbols, but over and over again the crescent, which ordinarily symbolizes the moon, is used, and this has led to the supposition that Tanit may have been considered the moon goddess. Baal-Hammon, whose function is obscure but who is sometimes regarded as god of the sun, was the masculine divinity.

One inscription, which is shown on the tablet as pictured, is said to be typical of the dedicatory sentiments. It says: "To our Lady, to Tanit Face of Baal, and to the Lord, to Baal-Hammon; that which was vowed by Eshmunhalas, son of Yitten-Melekh, son of Baal-Amas, son of Melekh-Yitten, son of Hami, son of Baal-Hanna, (because) they heard his voice (and) they blessed him."

This message of thanksgiving to the goddess for favors received appears harmless enough at first. The ancestry of the devotees is carefully charted out, and the archæologists have found that sometimes lineage for eight or nine generations is given, indicating that the stelae were set up by representatives of aristocratic old families of Carthage.

But does anything sinister lie back of the phrase "To Tanit . . . and to Baal-Hammon, that which was vowed . . .?" And, more particularly, what of the clay urns and their contents?

Dr. Kelsey asks: "Does this deposit of charred bones of young children under dedicatory stones along with bones of kids and lambs and little birds imply that these were all victims, offered by burning alive to Tanit, or to Tanit and Baal-Hammon?"

Before the question can be answered, he says, there must be a laboratory examination of the contents of the urns and also further excavations, for the sacred area may be much larger and there may be many thousands more of the urns.

Even after more than 2,500 years it may be possible for scientists, by examining the partially burned bones, to determine whether the children were committed to the flames before or after death.

History declares that children were "passed through the fire" by the Carthaginians to their gods, and that the practice persisted even after the

(Just turn the page)

Ancient Carthage

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Roman conquest. The brazen figure of Baal, most prominent masculine deity of Carthage, is described by an ancient writer as having outstretched arms, so inclined that when babies and young children were placed on them as an offering these would slide down into a burning furnace below. And this may have been the way by which the bones of so many children came to the sacred precincts of the goddess Tanit.

Count Byron de Prorok, associate director of the Franco-American expedition, who began explorations at Carthage, about 1922 and who impressed upon Americans the importance of salvaging something from the famous site before it is too late, says that this question of human sacrifice is one of the greatest problems of the temple area. He believes that the children whose charred bones are found in the urns were offered up alive.

The presence of animal bones in some of the urns suggests to him that perhaps some of the parents succeeded in secretly substituting animals as offerings to the blood-thirsty deities.

The Carthaginians were abhorred by the Greeks and Romans because of this terrible custom of "passing their people through the fire," according to Count de Prorok. Diodorus Siculus mentions that in the year 311 B.C. as many as three hundred people were sacrificed during one ceremony. One of the most remarkable conditions of a peace treaty ever recorded, he says, was that made by Gelon of Syracuse on behalf of the Greeks.

After defeating the Carthaginians at the battle of Himera, they demanded as a condition of peace the abolition of the sacrifice of children at Carthage.

Abbe J. B. Chabot, also a member of the expedition staff, states that it is a significant fact that bones of birds and animals are found in some of the older urns, while the later urns are filled with human remains. This may mean that as they progressed in civilization the Carthaginians sacrificed infants in even greater numbers than in earlier periods.

Whether archaeologists can acquire more land and continue their work of solving the numerous Carthaginian mysteries is still uncertain.

Dr. Kelsey's report states that "While excavation and accidental discovery have brought to light thousands of objects of interest reflecting



A TABLET IN HONOR OF TANIT
Stone tablet in honor of Tanit, favorite Carthaginian deity. The crescent moon, a symbol of the goddess, is carved at the top. The reason for the bottle, resting on a pedestal, is still unfathomed.

the cultures of the Punic, the Roman and later periods, there are still great gaps in our knowledge; in particular, there is a singular lack of decisive evidence regarding the topography of the city in the different epochs, the stages of its development, and the relations of its harbors to the sea.

"To what extent it is still possible to obtain a knowledge of either Punic or later Carthage by digging can only be ascertained through an extended and skilfully conducted series of trial excavations. But in any case, though the recovery of works of art of a high order cannot be safely anticipated, such excavations are necessary if the world is not soon to lose all opportunity to recover what may yet be recovered of the data requisite to complete that important chapter of cultural history."

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There were eye specialists in Egypt by 500 B. C.

Congress appropriated \$9,000 for rainmaking experiments in 1891.

Alaska now has a game commission to conserve and increase its fur and game resources.

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Has a scientific expedition returned? Send us pictures of the specimens that were secured and the men who collected them.

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In other words, we want interesting pictures of creditable scientific achievements, and we shall pay to get them.

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