

Remains of the past in Lebanon and Damascus in Spanish texts from the 19th century

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The relations between Spain and the Ottoman Empire were very superficial during the Eastern Question¹, and thus quite different from those of the 16th century² when they fought in the Mediterranean Sea until the battle of Lepanto (1571), because then the situation was more or less clear: Spain kept its influence in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Ottomans in the West and most of the North African coast. Since the late 16th century Spain began to change its geopolitical perspectives by giving more importance to the Atlantic and less to the fighting of the enemies of the True Faith³. In 1783-84 both empires signed a peace treaty and put an end to a conflict that at the time was more literary than real. Both empires came into the orbit of Great Britain and France, the liberal countries that recognized the Spanish queen in 1833 and the role of the Sultan Abdül-Mecid in the reforms of the *Tanzimat*. Russia wanted to establish contact with the Mediterranean through Anatolia or the Balkans and supported the Spanish queen's uncle, Don Carlos, until the end of the Crimean War (1855), when Queen Victoria and Napoleon III aided the Turks against the Russian aggression in the Black Sea. Spain sent few warships to help the Ottomans, more as an observer than a fighter, and in the Spanish press the view of the Turks

¹ Morales Lezcano, V., *España y la Cuestión de Oriente*, Madrid, Biblioteca Diplomática Española, 1992.

² Sánchez, E.; Martín Asuero, P. and Bernardini, M. (eds.), *España y el Oriente árabo-musulmán, siglos XIV-XVI*, Estambul, Isis, 2007.

³ Martín Asuero, P. (ed.), *España-Turquía, del enfrentamiento al análisis mutuo*, Estambul, Isis, 2003.

varies between the longtime used images from Cervantes⁴ or Lope de Vega's works and a modern image of the time. We should not forget that it was in the Crimean War (1854-1855) that newspapers readers firstly saw the pictures of a war.

After this war the European powers got into the politics and the economy of the Ottomans. The honeymoon with the West would be finished in the summer of 1860 in the Mount Lebanon, a place where Maronites and Druzes had lived together in peace for many centuries. Between May and the end of June of 1860 the Maronite revolt repudiated the Druze hegemony. At least two hundred villages were destroyed and many people were killed, with the civil war then spreading to the Bekaa valley and to Damascus⁵.

In Spain, the conquests of Northern Africa that took place in January of the same year and the Neo-Catholicism experienced in those days produced many articles in the newspapers of Madrid. *El Mundo Militar* of the 29th of June 1860 reports the events in Zahle and Deir el Kamar where two weeks before a hord of 12.000 Turks, Druzes and local Muslims devastated Zahle, a town in the Beqaa valley (also called the "Bride of the Beqaa") where most of the population was Christian. The Spanish readers also found information about those events in *La Correspondencia de España* (July 19th), namely regarding the attack on the Jesuit mission, which had a French flag.

At that time, the conflict assumed international proportions and France, which since the 16th century had agreed to protect the Eastern Christians, sent her army as the Ottomans where unable to establish it. The positive image from the Crimea War was broken and the Turks began to lose the support of those who aided them against the Russian aggression. The Spanish press also changed its position as we can read in articles such as that of *La Epoca*, the 28th July of 1860: "the Turkish Empire is lost in a chaos with no way out, it is a social and political

⁴ Martín Asuero, P.; Yayıoğlu, M. and Toledo, P., (eds.), *Cervantes y el Mediterráneo hispano-otomano*, Estambul, Isis, 2006.

⁵ Makdisi, U., *The Culture of Sectarism, Community, History and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon*, University of California Press, 2000, pp. 118-119.

corpse that will not be able to galvanize regardless of the most violent excitations; it is a nation that has lost its mission in the world as others did before it like Babylon, Chaldea or Syria itself and shined with so much splendor and had its place in the those same places that are the theater of those horrible disorders”. This newspaper reported that two Spanish warships were to be sent to “cooperate to the amends of the Christianity and the civilization betrayed in a cruel and barbarian way” (*La Epoca*, 27th July of 1860). Those warships never left their harbours but it seems that the readers had enough information about the facts and that Spain was considering to enter into the Eastern Question whose focus was the Levant, where European powers managed to split the Mount Lebanon from the rest of Syria at that time and gave it a status of *mutessarrifiye*, an autonomous province, with a *mutessarrif* appointed by the Sublime Door and accepted by France and Great Britain.

The Damascus events of the 10th of July were the only factor that affected Spain: three convents, eleven churches, the Greek patriarchate and all the consulates but the British one were destroyed. Among them were the Spanish Franciscan convent, founded in 1664, and the eleven priests, eight of them from Spain were assassinated. It is possible to find many articles from that time in the most important newspapers and magazines containing other information about topics such as: Syria, Lebanon, Damascus, Beirut; the Maronites or the Druzes; the arrival of the French army; the punishment of Ahmet Pasha, the Ottoman governor who was executed by the Turks. Spain requested to the Sublime Door an indemnification of 2.182.417 piasters in December 1861. With that money they rebuilt the convent and, in 1870, sent pictures and cult objects for the new church.

Spain strengthened its presence in the Levant through its consulates in Jerusalem, Damascus and Beirut. Many of the diplomats wrote books⁶ about the region describing the people, the landscape, the

⁶ Martín Asuero, P., “Los diplomáticos españoles y el redescubrimiento del Imperio Otomano”, catalog of the exhibition *La aventura española en Oriente [1166-2006] Viajeros, museos y estudiosos en la historia del redescubrimiento del Oriente Próximo Antiguo*, Córdoba, J. and Pérez Díe, M^a C. (eds.) Madrid, Ministerio de Cultura, 2006, pp. 133-142.

monuments and the ruins⁷. At the same time some books written by foreign travelers, like Lamartine or Chateaubriand, were translated or reprinted⁸. The fact is that Spanish readers had many books about the Eastern Question⁹ at their disposal, by the end of the Ottoman Empire, a land that kept until the beginning of the 20th century some of the most important remains of the past in the Holy Land, Egypt, Mesopotamia or Minor Asia.

Regarding the production of those texts it is possible to discern different stages. The first one corresponds to the end of the 18th century, shadowed by the Age of Enlightenment and the *Encyclopaedia*; a second stage is the Age of Romanticism, when scientific aspects lose ground in the observers' perception, most of the latter being travellers in eastern and exotic surroundings¹⁰. Indeed the 19th century the Ottoman Empire saw the arrival of a new type of visitors: the romantic travelers¹¹. They were incited by their countries but by the desire of personal knowledge and experiences in exotic scenery. The ruins played an important role since Volnay went to Palmyra in the late 18th century and published his meditations about the ruins: *Les Ruins, ou meditations sur les revolutions des empires* (1791).

Domingo Badía is included in the first generation of romantics like Byron, Chateaubriand or Potocky, all of them well translated into Spanish. Domingo Badía, also known as Ali Bey, the Abbasi, the

⁷ Martín Asuero, P., *España y el Líbano, (1788-1910) viajeros, diplomáticos, peregrinos e intelectuales*, Madrid, Miraguano, 2003. Martín Asuero P., *Descripción del Damasco otomano (1808-1920) según las crónicas de viajeros españoles e hispanoamericanos*, Madrid, Miraguano, 2004.

⁸ Martín Asuero, P., "Le Voyage en Orient de Lamartine, sa traduction en espagnole et son influence sur les auteurs hispaniques", in Durusoy, G.(ed), *Actes du colloque international sur Lamartine*, Izmir, 2004, pp 189-194.

⁹ Martín Asuero, P., *Viajeros hispánicos en Estambul; de la cuestión de Oriente al reencuentro con los sefardíes (1784-1918)*, Estambul, Isis, 2005.

¹⁰ García-Romeral Pérez, C., *Bio-Bibliografía de Viajeros Españoles (Siglo XVIII)*. Madrid, Ollero & Ramos, 1997.

¹¹ García-Romeral Pérez, C., *Bio-Bibliografía de Viajeros Españoles (Siglo XIX)*, Madrid, Ollero & Ramos, 1995; Litvak, L., *El Ajedrez de Estrellas. Crónica de Viajeros españoles del siglo XIX por países exóticos (1800-1913)*, Barcelona, Laia, 1986.

pseudonym he used in his journeys from Morocco to Istanbul between 1803 and 1807, disguised as Arab collecting information for the Spanish king (who at that time was Joseph Bonaparte). We know that he was circumcised but it is not clear whether his conversion to Islam was real or not. However, we know that he was one of the first Europeans to get into the Mosque at Mecca. Domingo Badía or Ali Bey is an interesting person, a romantic hero from the Age of Enlightenment who spoke Arabic fluently and wrote one of the best descriptions of the Ottoman Empire and Morocco at the eve of the 19th century¹². After the French were defeated in Spain, he took shelter in France, as the new king never forgave him his collaboration with Napoleon's brother. This is why his book was first printed in Paris in 1814, and two years later in London with the title *Travels of Ali Bey in Morocco, Tripoli, Cyprus, Arabia, Syria and Turkey between the years 1803 and 1807*; in the same year his work was translated into Italian and German and saw daylight in Milan and Weimar; in 1818 another English version appears in Boston; and it is finally translated to Spanish in Valencia in 1836, after the death of Ferdinand VII¹³.

As I wrote before, Lamartine had a great influence in the creation of the Spanish romantic image of Istanbul, Syria and Lebanon in the 1830's. The Spanish and Latin-American bookshops of the time had Lamartine and Chateaubriand's texts and also some written by local authors like Roger Coma, *A military, geographical, political and religious description of the Ottoman Empire*, (Madrid, 1829) or Fermín Caballero's *La Turquía*. Spain and Turkey got into the orbit of the liberal nations in the 1830's. At that time, Europe supported the reforms of the *Tanzimat* and preferred a modern Turkey instead of some conservative powers like Russia, which was expanding towards Central Asia. The Ottoman Empire was a peaceful place and soon it was possible to see improvements in communications and the opening of

¹² Almárcegui, P., *Ali Bey y los viajeros europeos a Oriente*, Barcelona, Alborán Bellaterra, 2007.

¹³ Bayon del Puerto, E., "Bibliografía sobre Ali Bey", *Ali Bei, Un pelegrí català per terres de l'Islam*, Barcelona, Museu Etnològic, 1996, p. 317.

the first banks, most of them with foreign capital. All of that gave birth to tourism, with hotels, restaurants and theatres. Tourists arrived by steamers going from Marseille to Istanbul, Alexandria, Smyrna, Beirut or Jaffa and since 1888 via the Orient Express. All this gave way to a new generation of very curious Spanish and Latin-American travelers. One of them is the Peruvian Pedro Paz Soldán y Unanue, one of the most important writers of the country in the 19th century. Another one is the Spanish diplomat Adolfo de Mentaberry, author of *From Madrid to Constantinople*, where he writes about his sojourn as vice-consul in Damascus in 1866 and his promotion to Istanbul one year later.

The second half of the 19th century produced a realistic literature, more objective than the Romanticism. That is the case of Juan de Dios de la Rada y Delgado, author of the report on the *Arapiles* frigate that sailed in the Mediterranean during 1871. This report, printed in Barcelona in 1876, gives a great deal of historical information about Turkey and the sultans, the new changes of the *Tanzimat*, the army or the situation of women and the social customs. During the last decades of the 19th century, Spain lived a period of political stability that allowed for economical development. Some members of the new bourgeoisie travelled to the Eastern Mediterranean and wrote about their experiences. Most of those books are about pilgrimages to the Holy Land and other places like Damascus, Baalbek, Cairo or Istanbul.

In the beginning of the 20th century Spain and Latin America had a new literary movement, the Modernism, which also sought exotic locations. At this time, travelling and sending information was easier than ever before and some newspapers from Madrid, Buenos Aires or Mexico sent journalists to describe the end of the Ottoman Empire, such as the Guatemalan Enrique Gómez Carrillo, who wrote books and articles about Jerusalem, Cairo, Greece, Istanbul, Damascus, the Mount Lebanon and other places in the East¹⁴.

¹⁴ García-Romeral Pérez, C., *Bio-Bibliografía de Viajeros Españoles (1900-1936)*, Madrid, Ollero & Ramos, 1997.

As I wrote before, the 18th century is well known by the importance given to studies of the Antiquity, which would be materialized in the French *Encyclopaedia* and the German philosophical currents. Kant is one of the most important examples since one of his disciples was the French count Constantin de Volney (1757-1820), one the precursors in Eastern travelling. He wrote *Les Ruines* (1791) and *Voyage en Egypt and Syrie*, taking place between the years 1783-1784, both translated in Spain¹⁵. This author, to whom the *Diccionario Enciclopédico Hispano-Americano* refers to as “the incredulous one”, has a rationalist vision of the cultures and the religions in its mediations on the ruins of Palmyra¹⁶. The Romanticism frequently uses them as the scenario for these kind of reflexion. In this context, the destructions of the old civilizations are seen from a perspective that is not longer that of divine aims.

Volney puts the ruins of Palmyra fashionable like those of Cairo, Petra, Baalbek that made dream travelers of all the times. One of the first descriptions of Baalbek is found in *Benjamin of Tudela's Itinerary*, by a Jew from Navarra who travelled to the Holy Land in the 13th century: “From (Salkat) there is half day to Baalbec, (that) is Baalot, in the BUQ'A of Lebanon, that was founded by Solomon for the daughter of the Pharaoh; the construction of the palace made of great stones, (being) the stone length (each) twenty hand spans and their width twelve hand spans. There is nothing between stone and stone, saying itself that this construction was done by Asmodeus. In the higher part of the city there is a great fountain that springs and runs by in the middle of the city like a great river, on which there are (installed) mills; within the city there are orchards and greenery.”¹⁷

¹⁵ *Las ruinas de Palmira* was printed in Zaragoza (1845), Madrid (1856, 1869, 1936 and 1983), *El viaje por Egipto y Siria durante los años de 1783, 1784 y 1785* was printed in Madrid in 1830 but unfortunately I haven't seen it.

¹⁶ Van Ess, M., *Heliopolis Baalbek 1898-1998, a la découverte des ruines*, Direction Générale des Antiquités du Liban / Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, 1998, p 66.

¹⁷ *Benjamín de Tudela, Libro de Viajes*, versión castellana, introducción y notas por José Ramón Nom de Deu, Barcelona, Riopiedras, 1989, pp. 85-86.

Only in 16th century would we rediscover Baalbek in books, drawings and engravings, and in the 19th century through the photographers. In the first half of 19th century, Lamartine described very well the ruins of Baalbek (also to the Spanish readers) in late March of 1833: “Impatient to see what the most remote Antiquity has left us of beautiful, of great, of mysterious, we intensified the passage of our tired horses, whose feet began to stumble upon pieces of marble, with pieces of columns with capitals demolished”¹⁸. Lamartine perceives the ruins without giving too much importance to their history or their size. He is mostly interested in the recreation of a landscape of desolation, exoticism and beauty, three elements of the Romanticism. As many other poets, Lamartine found among the ruins the perfect place to exalt his sentimental ego:

*“The great temples seemed like statues on their pedestals; the sun illuminated them with its last rays, which retired with slowness from a column to another one, like brilliance of a lamp that at heart commits the priest of a sanctuary: the numerous shades of the porches, the pilasters, the stone columns and altars, seemed to move in this expanded stone forest, and little by little replaced on the Acropolis shining brilliance of marbles.”*¹⁹

The Spanish readers learned about Baalbek through the book of the Swiss Abbot Michel Mislin who visited Baalbek in 1848. He got very close but his team refused to continue as they knew of a cholera outbreak in the region. That was not an obstacle to making reference to the ruins and to express his disapproving regarding the Metualis and the religions previous to Christianity: “between that infinity of columns, and so many masterpieces, a degrading cult for the humanity used to be celebrated; for that reason all those Gods with the crowd of its worshippers had never rebuilt their altars.”²⁰ As we can see, ruins also served to illustrate romantic melancholy or to condemn paganism.

¹⁸ Lamartine, A., *Viaje a la Palestina*, Valencia, José Matheu Cervera, 1844, p. 18.

¹⁹ *Idem*, p. 46.

²⁰ Mislin, J., *La Tierra Santa, Peregrinación a Jerusalén*, Barcelona, La Maravilla, 1864, p. 153.

Adolfo de Mentaberry, a young Spanish vice-consul in Damascus²¹, arrived at Baalbek on the 8th of May of 1867 by horse and found a city of 4,000 souls, the majority Christians, Greek Catholics whose bishop was in Rome attending a Council. Once again, in order to understand the Antiquity he resorted to the Bible, where this city appears with the names of Baal Gad and Balath, later on taking the Greek name of Heliopolis, the “City of the Sun”. Mentaberry narrates how the Egyptian priests had brought to Syria the solar cult. The religion of Baal was the one that dominated when the Israelites, under Joshua, took over this region. According to his knowledge, most of the ruins were Roman and, in the time of Constantine, the site was Christianized. The Caliph Omar conquered the city and turned the Jupiter temple into a fortress that faced the Crusaders, the Turks, the Kurds and the Ottomans. After providing the historical background, Mentaberry goes himself to the middle of the ruins to contribute with his own perception of the remains of Baalbek, which allows him to make a romantic reflection on the time, the nature and God:

“Everything was in winch of shady and imposing me in that dreadful solitude: the monoliths of more than five meters, inlaid more in the wall without mortar, neither wedges nor nothing, as if the hand of a genius had transported them there; the rocks nailed in the ground, of greater dimensions still; the layed and truncated columns, half hidden in earth, like beheaded and giants not buried yet; the underground lengths opening in the depth its tenebrous and incommensurable mouth; everything, in short, was shown to my eyes great, colossal, ciclopedous and overwhelming and at that first moment I felt with great immensity that feeling of nihilism, became aware that of the human smallness that the man experiments when he floats on the immensity of the ocean or when he is isolated in the middle of that other sea with sand

²¹ Martín Asuero, P. “Adolfo de Mentaberry en Damasco”, *Cervantes. Revista del Instituto Cervantes de Damasco* 3 (2003), pp. 43-67.

waves, that are called the desert, on the foot of the Himalayas, or in the highest summit of the Andes; that is to say, before one of those huge scenes of the nature, magnificent images, sublime sparkles, augustous and inimitable characteristics of the divine omnipotence.”²²

The expedition of the *Arapiles* frigate also visited Baalbek as we can read in de la Rada’s work, who dedicates a whole chapter to it. This author combines his personal vision of what he saw on the 27th of August of 1871 with descriptions of Lamartine, Laborde and Saulcy. The text compilation is common, as most of the travelers never stayed more than a few days and knew little about the places; also, they usually believed that what other travelers saw was true. The ruins are seen in two ways: the romantic one, with passages of Lamartine, and the realistic one, with data concerning measurements, materials, styles, etc. De la Rada crossed the fortified enclosure and reports that it is similar in its disposition to the Acropolis of Athens, the Small Temple and the Great Temple, of which there are six columns still on. The following quotation is meant to clarify how in the treatment of the ruins in the literature of travelers it is possible to arrange Realism with Romanticism; how is possible to associate the scientific description with the exaltation of romantic ego:

“The other temple of which it conserves rest in the Acropolis de Baalbek, is the one of the Sun, call also “Great Temple”. As it indicates this denomination, he was much more vast that the previous one, but is much worse conserved. It raises in the angle NW of the Acropolis, on the gigantic lines of which we have spoken, and the hugeness of its little rest demonstrates that it had to be the most gigantic monument of Syria, and explains the fact that was well known in the old world. It was a peripterous

²² Mentaberry, A., *Viaje a Oriente, de Madrid a Constantinopla*. Madrid, Berenguillo 1873. p. 218. There is a new edition in Nausícaä, Murcia, 2007.

temple and castle, oriented like the one of Jupiter, and whose length would be of near 90 meters by 50 of width. Its front had 10 columns and 19 to each side, composing between a total of 54 columns, of which they are left still, with corinthian capitals, maintaining entablature with friezes and a cornice richly carved. The woods measure 7,15m of circumference and 18,85m of length, being their overall height, included the entablature, of 23m, 40 and intercolumniation of 2,54m. In that colossal rest of the huge temple, with reason, M. of Laborde says that he does not know what to admire more, if the singularity of the sort, the greatness of the character, the wealth of the decoration, the projection of the shades, the audacity of the forms, the powerful execution, the precision of the allegories, because he admires everything, everything raises the imagination, everything inspires high ideas, everything takes to deep reflections. Nowhere are seemed masses, so ample masses, put so well and so susceptible in details, whose effect, still to great distance and prodigious height is always sensible and remarkable.”²³

By the end of the century tourism begins to develop and, in 1874, the Palmyra Hotel, which has lodged travelers like Kaiser William (in 1898), or the Spanish king Alfonso XII, opens doors. The inauguration of the railway line Beirut-Damascus in 1895, with a branch between Rayyak and Homs in 1902 that ended in Baalbek, remarkably impelled the arrival of the tourists. Manuel Quintana, another Spanish diplomat detached to Lebanon, analyzes this new phenomenon of masses, which then had become a common practice: “those same ruins will also soon disappear, because every traveler who arrives there comes provided with a hammer and breaks and destroys in order to take with him some pieces of such-and-such column”²⁴.

²³ De la Rada y Delgado, J. *Viaje a Oriente de la Fragata Arapile*, Barcelona, Emilio Oliver y Cia., 1876, pp. 57-58.

²⁴ Quintana, M., *Siria y Libano*, Madrid, 1877, pp. 32-33.

Three Galician travelers, a doctor and two professors of the University of Santiago de Compostela, visited the Holy Land in 1875 and contributed with more information and pictures of the ruins of Baalbek. Their texts are very similar as far as the treatment of the ruins and the old traveller's literature that they consulted is concerned. The book of the Galician professors, *Santiago, Jerusalén, Roma. Diario de una peregrinación a estos y otros santos lugares* is also focused on the Christians of Baalbek, as other travelers like Lamartine, Mislin or Mentaberry had done. Among the chapters dedicated to Baalbek, there is one on the ruins and another one about the population of this town, emphasizing the parish of the Maronites and the school of the Mariametas. After attending mass, they visited the ruins and went to see the bishop, Monsignor Basilio Nasser, a Greek Catholic. They could not repeat this with the Maronite bishop because he was out of his diocese, but the parish priests lead them to the church and school.

In the 1880's *El Mundo Ilustrado* of Barcelona requested to Francisco Miguel Badía the composition of work on the Holy Land that was printed twice a month and illustrated with engravings by different artists. At that time, Syria and Lebanon (both part of the Ottoman Empire) took part of it: the former (with Damascus) because of Saint Paul and the latter due to its cedars and the passing of Jesus in the Tyro-Phoenician lands. *El Mundo Ilustrado* gave importance to the ruins of Baalbek, with illustrations of the Temple of the Sun, the six columns of the Great Temple or the Temple of Venus, and others. Some of these images do not have human figures, therefore emphasizing the effect of desolation. Others show Bedouins riding horses or camping around a fire at night, stressing the contrast between the ruins (representing what once was a great civilization) and the present day: a landscape of ruins occupied by Arabian tribes. Francisco Miguel y Badía did not go to Lebanon but he consulted many books in English, French and German in order to describe the ruins and the population of Baalbek: "five thousand inhabitants, are a compound of schismatic and Maronites, Muslims, Metualis, Greek Catholic and

Greek Orthodox Christians”²⁵. Churches and two of the mosques were built with materials coming from the ruins. This author recommends the month of April “to enjoy better the sublime spectacle of the ruins and the country that surrounds them”.

Indeed Damascus is a walled garden but the city shapes a sight that appears in the first vision of it and takes form as the traveler enters himself and describes it. Progress and “civilization” might have arrived to Beirut and other Levantine harbors, but this was not the case of Damascus, where it was still possible to see images and people full of local color, traditional dresses, camels and everything drawn from the Orientalism. In this context, and in parallel, the walls acquire a symbolic value when reflecting the isolation of Damascus from Europe. It needs not remembrance that the city resisted the Crusader offensive and even though belonged to the Ottoman Empire since the beginning of the 16th Century, in the 19th still enjoyed a great autonomy. Its protection from the outside had thus allowed it to conserve traditional ways of life which were exotic and interesting to the European observers. The length and beauty of its doors and the fact that St. Paul escaped through the walls were other components conforming to their perspective.

At the beginning of the 19th century, Domingo Badía regarding as Damascus mentions that the city “is surrounded by walls, with towers and some pits; but these ruined works are not able to maintain a strong offensive.”²⁶ We must not forget that since the 16th century it had belonged to the Ottoman Empire, the reason why the city experienced four centuries of no external aggression. There was no need to defend itself and, therefore, the walls had lost its defensive function and their reconstruction was not a high-priority. This situation changed during the Egyptian occupation of Syria in 1832. The borders of the Ottoman Empire changed and Syria and Lebanon were lost for a while. Lamartine left us an image of city walls in a better condition: “the square towers

²⁵ Miguel Badía, F., *Palestina según el coronel Wilson, Warren, Jorge Ebers, Herman Guthe, Victor Guerin, Lortet y otros autores*, Barcelona, *El Mundo Ilustrado*, 1881, p. 384.

²⁶ Badía, D., *Viajes por Arabia, Palestina, Siria y Turquía*, Barcelona, Olañeta, 1982, p. 446.

that flanked and dominated the line, were inlaid of arabesque, and drilled of pointed arches with very thin columns like matched canes and the battlements finished off in turban. The outer part of the wall, dressed marbles of black and yellow color, alternated with elegant symmetry with the glasses of the cypresses and the other great trees, that rising in the gardens and inside the city, stood out over the walls and of the towers, and they made them emphasize on green the dark of the hoisted one.”²⁷

Adolfo de Mentaberry related the walls and its doors to History, or rather, with the history of religions. Let us not forget that the walls appear in holy texts, nor the link between the romanticism of historical recreations and ruins, which shapes not only the passage of time but also the ephemerid they were in the distant and glorious past. The diplomat, once described the customs of the people of Damascus, proposes a stroll to the walls:

“Now, to finish the slight sketch which I have done of the city, it is precise that the reader gives with me a walk by its environs. Leaving by the Eastern door, Bab-Charqui, as the Turks call it, or Bab-Bulos, door of Saint Paul, according to the Christians, monumental factory, whose three Phoenician arcs are recognized still perfectly, although lacks the tower that crowned them, is taught in the wall the site by where fled the Apostle, protected by its disciples, who lowered within a basket [to him...]. The walls of Damascus are ancient and very remarkable, made with enormous ashlar, blackened and removed flesh by the destruction of the time, being in them cavities where many poor families dwell. Those huge monoliths, superposed and united without foundation have suggested to Damascenes the belief that its origin is Phoenician, although soon have been recovered by the Greeks, the Romans and the Arabs, leaving each one of these stone towns printed the track of their domination.”²⁸

²⁷ Lamartine, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

²⁸ Mentaberry, *op. cit.*, pp. 258-259.

Many of the elements used by romantic view continue with Realism, but they do not exalt their ego on the same way and do not use the same kind of evocations with fantastic recreations. Juan de Dios de la Rada described the walls with explanations similar to those of a modern-day travel guide: “the door of the E. (Bab-ech-Charqui), the best of Damascus, located to the East extremity, in the Straight street, adorned once with columns, and that the same place occupies the old Via Recta of the Romans, displays an imposing aspect, with its construction still of Roman time. Near her where rises the almenara tower of Arab construction, that crowns the minaret, from there is possible to contemplate the magnificent panorama.”²⁹

Something similar happens in the text of Narciso the Perez Reollo, *Viaje a Egipto, Palestina y otros países de Oriente* (Lugo, 1883), which mentions the “very old walls” that have seen the passing of the different masters of the city. He revisited one by one the nine doors that give entrance to the city with their respective names and explanations. He also mentions the Acts of the Apostles, chapter IX, vv 20-25, recalling the fleeing of St. Paul near the door of Bab-Kisan and includes a map of the old part of the city with the walls highlighted in black.

One of the best descriptions of the walls is that of Francisco Miguel Badía, in *El Mundo Ilustrado*. According to him, the walls formed an oval shape of 1,700 m in length by 850 m in their greater width, and perimeter of 4 km. Another aspect that the other observers did not emphasize was that the walls were based on the Barada river, being a pit in those zones that did not have this natural defense³⁰. *El Mundo Ilustrado* has engravings of the citadel and various gates such as the Bab Tuma (The Gate of Saint Thomas) or the Bab Sharki (The Eastern Gate), but also from an arch next to the tomb of Saladin, the remains of a triumphal arch to the exit of the Souk Hamidiye, the door of the Christian basilica (now the Umayyad mosque) with an inscription from the Psalms in Greek. Those illustrations usually contain images of people

²⁹ De la Rada, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

³⁰ Francisco Miguel Badía, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-162.

in traditional costumes and animals such as horses, dogs, camels, birds or plants, in part with the purpose of providing a reference to the size of the ruins but also to add local color. Not just due to the clothes: often these people are making traditional works, usually handicrafts, carpenters, jewelers, carpets sellers or scenes of the daily life in markets, cafes with Arabs smoking water pipes or drinking coffee. The gravures belong to different artists and according to the signature we can assume that they were from France, England, Austria or Germany. In fact, in the second half of the 19th century there was a great amount of this kind of images, a part of the Orientalism art, for the illustrated magazines and books.

As we can see, the Spanish and Latin-American readers were interested in Syria and Lebanon as exotic sceneries and later on as touristic destinations that were first “discovered” by the romantic travelers and then became more popular in the late 19th century, as the industry of tourism developed. The ruins have always fascinated their observers because they allow one to access the past. In this case, with a former splendor now disappeared, that is also part of our cultural heritage as it dates from the time of Jesus Christ, the Roman province of “Palestine” and the sojourn of St. Paul in Damascus.



Caption: “Vista del Portico del Templo del Sol en Baalbek”

después de esta excavación histórica, sobre Damasco y de indicaciones que hemos hecho, acerca de la fertilidad, belleza y encanto de sus alrededores, tierras y parajes en la población y la desolación dando la una idea general á nuestros lectores. La ciudad sólo aun en el día limitada por sus viejas murallas, en toda su parte muy principal, así cuando en los tiempos han sido objeto de repetidas variaciones y reformas. Forma Damasco en su conjunto un óvalo al ser medido en su mayor anchura. Hacia el centro del otro de cerramiento con hermosas piedras, bien cortadas, conservándose todavía en su sitio sitio gran número de hiladas inferiores, no le ha propio con las hiladas superiores, muchas de ellas acusan restauraciones y señalan épocas de mucha más reciente. A intervalos de unos treinta se se alzaban torres cuadradas, sobre cuyos basamentos los árabes montaron torres semicirculares, edificados con piedras de diversos tamaños y por lo común usando aparejo, según acostumbraron hacerlo en sus castillos y murallas las gentes de aquella raza. Creer que si se practicasen excavaciones en los es de que hablamos, se lograría descubrir sin las dificultades el primitivo recinto, que conforme a dicho anteriormente, apenas ha cambiado de estructura, si por acaso ha sufrido en él variación alguna de. Este recinto, cuya circunferencia no excede de 1 kilómetro, dimension en verdad nada conside-



Caption: “Bab es-Cherki ó puerta oriental de Damasco”



voces de muerte se encerraron en el convento, desde donde oían cantar al populacho el canto de exterminio: «Dulce cosa es verter la sangre de los cristianos.» En nombre de Abd-el-Kader se les propuso conducirles á la ciudadela ó á la casa del emir, lo cual no admitieron por querer mantenerse, hasta el último instante de su vida, guardianes de su santuario, según el nombre que llevan en el Oriente. No ignoraban á qué se exponían obrando de esta suerte. Algunas horas después una horda furiosa sitió el convento, incendió luego la puerta, que no cedió á sus redoblados golpes, y entró en el recinto en donde los asesinos encontraron, entre llamas y humo, á los religiosos que les esperaban. «Heros turcos,—dijéronles aquellos fanáticos,—y vuestras vidas serán respetadas.» «Somos cristianos.» respondieron sencillamente, y á tales palabras fueron inmediatamente degollados. Había en medio del huerto un profundo pozo, á donde se nos condujo al través de ruinas, y allí en el fondo, revestidos aun de sus hábitos hechos girones, vimos los cadáveres de aquellos mártires.»
En circunstancias tan terribles Abd-el-Kader se portó admirablemente y usó un héroe. Con el auxilio de sus argelinos, bien

Caption: "Casas en la muralla de Damasco"



Caption: “El arco de Triunfo de la Gran Mezquita”



Caption: “Entrada de las ruinas de Baalbek”



Caption: “La ciudadela de Damasco”



Caption: “Las seis columnas del gran templo en Baalbek”



Caption: “Palestina: Templo del Sol en Baalbek”



Caption: "Palestina: Tumba de Saladino en Damasco"



Caption: “Palestina: Puerta del templo del Sol en Baalbek”



Caption: “Uno de los angulos del templo del Sol en Baalbek”