

# TRANSJORDAN AND EGYPT ON THE MOSAIC MAP OF MADABA

by  
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## Introduction

The famous mosaic map of Madaba from the sixth century A.D. is one of our main sources for the topography of Roman and Byzantine Palestine on both sides of the river Jordan and the Dead Sea, and of Lower Egypt.<sup>1</sup> The *Deutscher Verein zur Erforschung Palästinas* (German Palestine Exploration Society) restored the map in 1965.<sup>2</sup> A first volume containing plates and photos was published by H. Cüppers and by myself in 1977.<sup>3</sup> The commentary will follow as soon as possible, together with an introduction to the topography of Byzantine Palestine. Here I am confining myself to a discussion of some problems concerning Transjordan and Lower Egypt as far as represented on the mosaic map, and to an explanation of my approximations and solutions. A general summary and introduction, especially about Transjordan, will be useful.

What can be seen on the Madaba Mosaic map east of the river Jordan, east of the Dead Sea, and in the *Wādī'l-ʿArabā*? Unfortunately, the mosaic is fragmentarily preserved. Some clear representations, however, can be recognized (from north to south) Beyond the river Jordan we see the lower part of *Nahr az-Zarqā* running into the Jordan. Near the badly preserved lion chasing a gazelle there are remnants of two cities surrounded with palm trees: the left one is ancient *Bethnambris* (modern *Tall Nimrīn* in the *Wādī Šuʿēb*), the right one is ancient *Livias* or *Iulias* (modern *Tall Ikta-*

*nū* and *Tall ar-Rāma*). South of *Livias* the *Wādī Zarqā Māʿīn* is running into the Dead Sea, and still in the mountain-region we see the hot springs of *Baaras*, to be restored [θ EPMA B] ἈΠΟΥ (i.e. *Ham-mām az-Zarqā Māʿīn*). Between the *Wādī Zarqā Māʿīn* and the *Wādī'l-Mūğib* there is a very interesting representation of the hot springs called *Kallirrhöe* (modern ʿAyn *Zāra*), where Herod the Great spent his last days, according to Flavius Josephus.<sup>4</sup> Between *Wādī'l-Mūğib* and *Wādī'l-Ḥasā* we note from east to west: 1. [Χαρ]αχμωβα (*al-Karak*); 2. Βητομαρσεα η κ(αι) Μαιουμας, Αἰα, and Θαραις, all of them to be discussed later on; 3. the ancient names of the Dead Sea: "Salt, also Pitch Lake, also the Dead Sea". In this area the highland east of the Dead Sea is given geographically in a quite exact manner, forming three levels of dislocation towards the sea-shore. South of river [Z]APEΔ *Wādī'l-Ḥasā* we find: 1. Τὸ τοῦ αἰγίου Λ[ωτ] "the sanctuary of Saint Lot", and 2. Βαλακ γ ἢ κ(αι) Σ[ηγωρ ἢ νῦν] Ζοορα "Balak, also Segor, now Zoora", known from the story in Gen. 19 — both of them situated in the *Gōr aš-Šāfi*. At this point the *Wādī'l-ʿArabā* is beginning, the desert of which is represented in yellowish cubes and explained by the inscription EPHMI[A] "desert". General informations about Lower Egypt will follow.

## Betomarsea, Aia, and Tharais

Underneath the symbol of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. P. Palmer and H. Guthe, *Die Mosaikkarte von Madaba*, I. *Tafeln*, Leipzig, 1906; M. Avi-Yonah, *The Madaba Mosaic Map*, Jerusalem, 1954.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. H. Donner and H. Cüppers, *Die Restauration und Konservierung der Mosaikkarte von Madaba*, Vorbericht, *ZDPV*, 83 (1967) p. 1-33, pl. 1-12.

<sup>3</sup> H. Donner and H. Cüppers, *Die Mosaikkarte von Madaba*, Teil I: *Tafelband*, Weisbaden, 1977; quoted as Donner-Cüppers.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. H. Donner, *Kallirrhöe, das Sanatorium Herodes' des Großen*, *ZDPV*, 79 (1963) p. 59-89; H. Schult, *Zwei Häfen aus römischer Zeit am Toten Meer, ruğm el-bahr und el-beled (ez-zāra)*, *ZDPV*, 82 (1966) p. 139-162.

[Χαρ]αχμωβα (*al-Karak*) there is a building pretty much similar to the sanctuary of Saint Elisha near Jericho, with a central dome flanked by two side vaults, cylindrical in shape.<sup>5</sup> It seems to be surrounded with plants and waters, perhaps indicating the exceptional luxuriance of vegetation in a spot blessed with plenty of water. The inscription runs as follows Βητομαρσεα ἢ κ(αὶ) Μαιουμας “Betomarsea, also Maiumas”. The meaning is clear. Betomarsea is the Greek transcription of Hebrew *bēt-marzēʿh*, in Aramaic *bēt-marzʿhā* “the house of a cultic congregation called *marzēʿh*”, in Jer. 16:5 rendered θῖασοῦς by the Septuagint.<sup>6</sup> Maiumas was a popular licentious feast with water festivals and symposia, widespread in the ancient Near East and mentioned in Ugaritic, Phoenician, Palmyrenian, Nabatean and Hebrew texts.<sup>7</sup> Its golden age was in the first half of the first millennium A.D. In our inscription it is combined with Betomarsea: one pagan abomination is explained by another one!

For what reason, however, is this combination represented on the Madaba map? Scholars were never at a loss for an answer. They called attention to Num. 25:1-5: The Israelites sinned with Midianite women at Beth-Baal-Peor, and this fact was identified by Rabbinic sources with *marzēʿh*;<sup>8</sup> therefore, the mosaic artist represented it on his map. But this solution seems unlikely. Beth-Baal-Peor was situated north of mount Nebo in the *Wādī ʿAyūn Mūsā*,<sup>9</sup> cp. Eusebius, *Onomasticon* 48; 3-5 and 168: 25-27. Maybe the exact knowledge of the site was lost in the sixth century, but the mosaic artist ought to have

known from the Bible and from Eusebius that it had been near Mount Nebo and not in the vicinity of *al-Karak*. M. Avi-Yonah<sup>10</sup> took for granted that the mosaicist rejected this location, being influenced by a mid-rashic tradition according to which the tents of the Ammonites and Moabites, in which Israel sinned, stretched for three parasangs from Beth-jeshimoth to *Tūr Talgā*, i.e. perhaps *Ġabal Umm at-Talāġa* near *al-Karak*. This suggestion is as unconvincing as R.T. O’Callaghan’s idea:<sup>11</sup> the artist could have located the shameful Beth-Baal-Peor as far as possible from his home town Madaba. Others considered, because of the faint similarity of the names, the village *Mazraʿ* or *Hirbat al-Bulēde* or even *Bāb ed-Drāʿ* (A. Musil<sup>12</sup> and F.-M. Abel<sup>13</sup>): places which are situated below the last dislocation level of the mountain-chain east of the Dead Sea, being too far from *al-Karak*.

The artist’s localizations are correct and trustworthy in general, especially as he had no lack of space. Let us take him at his word and search for Betomarsea in the area where he put it: north-west of *al-Karak*, not too far from the city. We should insist on the following principle of interpretation: the localizations on the mosaic map are to be taken as correct unless there are strong reasons not to do so. In our case there are no reasons against it. The peculiarity of the symbol representing a building on a ground rich in water and vegetation gives every reason to believe that the artist meant a distinct building at a distinct spot: the house of a *marzēʿh*-congregation, still existing in the sixth century near *al-Karak*, a curiosity in the

<sup>5</sup> Donner - Cüppers, pl. 17.53.54.56.104.105.

<sup>6</sup> For discussion cf. O. Eißfeldt, *Kleine Schriften* 4 (1968) p. 285-296; 5 (1973) p. 118-142; P.D. Miller, *AnOr*, 48 (1971) p. 37-49; M. Dahood, *idem.*, p. 51-54; M. Heltzer, *IEJ*, 12 (1972) p. 255; W. V. Soden, *ZA*, 62 (1972) p. 281s.; A. F. Rainey, *IOS*, 3 (1973) p. 61; T. L. Fenton, *UF*, 9 (1977) p. 71-75; M. Dietrich-O. Loretz, *UF*, 10 (1978) p. 421s.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. K. Preisendanz, *Maiumas*, *RE*, XIV, 1 (1928) p. 610-612.

<sup>8</sup> First proposed by A. Büchler, *Une localité énigmatique mentionnée sur la mosaïque de Madaba*, *Revue des Études Juives*, 42 (1901) p. 125-128. For the Rabbinic sources cf., e.g., *Midrash Sifre*

*R.* § 131; *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Num. 25: 2 a.o.*

<sup>9</sup> Cf. O. Henke, *Zur Lage von Beth Peor*, *ZDPV*, 75 (1959) p. 155-163.

<sup>10</sup> *Loc. cit.*, p. 41.

<sup>11</sup> R. T. O’Callaghan, *Madaba (Carte de)*, *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, (ed. L. Pirot et A. Robert), Suppl. V, fasc. 26 (1953) p. 677.

<sup>12</sup> A. Musil, *Moab. Vorbericht über eine ausführliche Karte und topographische Beschreibung des alten Moab*, *Anzeiger der Kaiserl. Akademie der Wissenschaften Wien*, 1903, p. 181.

<sup>13</sup> F.-M. Abel, *Géographie de la Palestine II*, 1938, 1967,<sup>2</sup> p. 284.

Christian Byzantine empire, perhaps the late successor of a Nabatean *marzḥā*-congregation. The conditions for the localization of Betomarsea according to the mosaic map are as follows: 1. Betomarsea was situated west or north-west of *al-Karak*; 2. one must not go beyond a line on which Aia and Tharais are located, i.e. not beyond *Ḥirbat ʿAy* and *al-ʿIrāq*; 3. One has to pay attention to road communication with *al-Karak*; 4. Springs or at least one remarkable spring are to be presumed.

The region northwest of *al-Karak* is characterized by the *wādīʿl-Karak*, also called *Sēl al-Karak*, connecting the city with the peninsula *al-Lisān*. The region is rich in water. Its topographical description could be better; the maps are incomplete and differ in details.<sup>14</sup> I am indebted to Mr. Mahmūd Ahmad aṣ-Ṣōb for useful information. He was an inhabitant of *al-Karak* in the sixties who lived with part of his family in the *Wādīʿl-Karak* and was well acquainted with the region. As far as I can see, primarily two spots come into question for the localization of Betomarsea:

1. *ʿAyn Zāra*, two road kilometres north-west of *al-Karak*, one of the main springs for the water supply of the city, situated in a very nice green headwater with many trees and bushes.
2. *Mūmyā*, about eight road kilometres north-west of *al-Karak*, near a village called *Baddān* which the maps wrongly localise on the left side of the *Wādīʿ*, but it is situated on the right side. My informant insisted on the name *Mūmyā* for the spot on the left side; this name is not mentioned in the maps. It is an area with five springs near a *Ḥirba*. The historical identity of the names *Mūmyā* and *Maiumas* cannot be excluded, but it is not certain at all. Further investigations are necessary.

The localization of the villages Aia and Tharais<sup>15</sup> is difficult as well, because these villages are not mentioned in the Bible or in other literary sources. Accord-

ing to the mosaic map they are located west or south-west of *al-Karak*, apparently on the second level of the mountain-chain towards the Dead Sea, on the same line — so to speak — and not too far from each other. Seen from *al-Karak*, they seem to be the last villages on the slope. That is all we can say. The very best suggestions, based on the mosaic map and on the similarity of the names, are as follows: *Ḥirbat ʿAy* for Aia and *al-ʿIrāq* near *ʿAyn Tarʿīn* for Tharais, both proposed by A. Musil<sup>16</sup> and by Ch. Clermont-Ganneau.<sup>17</sup> We have to leave out of consideration older identifications, e.g. with *al-ʿAyna* or *Dāt Rās* on the northern bank of *Wādīʿl-Ḥasā*, because these places are much too far from *al-Karak*. *Hirbat ʿAy* and *al-ʿIraq*, however, are suitable locations on the following grounds: 1. they are situated south-west of *al-Karak*; 2. They are situated on the second level as described above, and 3. they are located near an old Roman road which connected *al-Karak* with the *Gōr an-Numēra* and the *Gōr aṣ-Ṣāfi*.

I visited *Hirbat ʿAy* and *al-ʿIrāq* in 1963. At *Ḥirbat ʿAy* on the eastern slope of *Wādīʿl-Fuḥēt* I found potsherds from Early Bronze, Middle Bronze, Iron II, Roman and Byzantine; there were no painted Mamlūk sherds, but some from the time after the Mamlūks. A road, not paved with asphalt, is going from *Ḥirbat ʿAy* to the northeast along *Wādī Kamannā* and *al-Ifranġ* to *al-Karak*. Its predecessor, bordered on both sides and with remains of road ballast, can be seen here and there. Beyond any doubt, this is the first part of the Roman road going from *al-Karak* by way of *Kaṭrabbā* down to the *Gōr an-Numēra* and *Gōr aṣ-Ṣāfi*. Impressive remains of this Roman road appear west of *Kaṭrabbā*.<sup>18</sup> At *al-ʿIrāq* on the northern slope of *Sēl Ġdēra* which runs into *Wādīʿl-ʿIrāq* I found some Roman and Byzantine potsherds, not far from *ʿAyn Tarʿīn*. Explorations are difficult there, because the

<sup>14</sup> Cf. 1:100 000 South Levant, N.H.36.F.6 Karak; 1:25 000 The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, sheet 210/065 Karak.

<sup>15</sup> Donner-Cüppers, Pl. 17, 18, 53, 55, 56, 57, 104, 105, 106, 107.

<sup>16</sup> See note 12.

<sup>17</sup> Ch. Clermont-Ganneau, La carte de la Palestine d'après la mosaïque de Madaba, *Recueil d'archéologie orientale*, 2 (1897/98) p. 169.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. N. Glueck, AASOR, XVIII-XIX (1939) p. 148, ill. 49.

modern village is situated on its own *tall*. About 150 m. southeast of the *tall* there is a *ḥirba* with some ruined houses and walls, called *al-balad al-qadīm*, with Arab potsherds from the times after the Mamlūks. I was told that the last inhabitant of *al-balad al-qadīm* left his house about fifty years ago. Obviously, the settlement was located in Roman and Byzantine times at the spot of modern *al-ʿIrāq* near *ʿAyn Tarʿīn*. After the Mamlūks the inhabitants partly emigrated from there to *al-balad al-qadīm*, and about fifty years ago they returned to the *tall* of *al-ʿIrāq*.

To summarize: the identifications of *Aia-Ḥirbat ʿAy* and *Tharais-al-ʿIrāq* are based on the following grounds: 1. the situation of both villages southwest of *al-Karak*; 2. the names *Ḥirbat ʿAy* and *ʿAyn Tarʿīn* near *al-ʿIrāq*; 3. the relative location of both villages to each other; 4. the pottery; 5. the situation at or near the Roman road to the Dead Sea. I think these identifications are correct.

#### Petra on the Mosaic Map of Madaba?

At the edge of the preserved part of the mosaic, south of river [Z]AΠEΔ (*Wādī'l-Ḥasā*), one can see two and a half black letters which are not represented on the plates of Palmer and Guthe and in the reprint of these plates by Avi-Yonah. They appeared during the restoration work in 1965.<sup>19</sup> We read ME, the third letter could be A, Λ, or Δ. Undoubtedly, these letters are the traces of a longer inscription, but of an inscription of which kind? A place name or the last line of an inscription not belonging to a town or a village? Is it a biblical reminiscence or a profane representation? Was there a symbol for a locality of the usual type with walls, towers and roofs, and if there was such a symbol, was it represented above the inscription or right of it or below? Does the inscription refer to the land of Edom or to the gulf of *ʿAqabā* or even to the peninsula of Sinai? We don't know. The fact that only two and

a half letters are preserved doesn't make the attempts for completion totally hopeless. I am reminded of another case on the same mosaic map: two and a half letters at the edge of the mosaic underneath the city of Neapolis could indeed be restored to an inscription of forty-one letters, namely the legend of "Dothaim where Joseph found his brothers pasturing".<sup>20</sup> Is there any chance to get an inscription merely based on the letters MEA, MEΛ or MEΔ

It seems to be impossible, especially if we have to suppose a profane representation or an inscription like *Aia* and *Tharais* being not far from our traces; for the number of literary references about the land east and southeast of the Dead Sea is small. The chances, however, increase if the inscription referred to is from the Bible. In this case we can trace back to the main sources from which the mosaic artist borrowed his information: the Greek Bible (Septuagint) and the "Onomasticon of Biblical Place Names" written by the bishop Eusebius of Caesarea and translated into Latin by St. Jerome. We have to take into consideration: either the remnant letters belong to an inscription which described one of the events mentioned in the Bible or to a place name or to the name of a region known from the Bible. In order to illustrate what I mean, I will call attention to three biblical reminiscences on the southern or south-eastern part of the mosaic map. They are of that kind which could be expected here:

1. Ραφιδιμ ἔνθα ἐπελθόντι τῷ Αμαληκ ὁ Ἰσραηλ ἐπολέμησεν "Raphidim where Israel fought against the coming Amalek";<sup>21</sup> cf. Ex. 17: 8-16.
2. Ἐρήμος Σιν ὅπου κατεπέμφθη τὸ μάννα κ(α ι) ἡ ὄρτυγομήτρα "The wilderness of Sin where the manna and the quails were sent down";<sup>22</sup> cf. Ex. 16: 1-36 and Num. 11: 4-34.
3. Ἐρῆμ[ος ἔνθα/ὄπου] τοὺς Ἰσραηλιτὰς ΕΩΩ(?)ΙΝ (= ἔσωσεν?) ο Χάλκουσ ὄφισ "The wilderness where the serpent of brass

<sup>19</sup> Donner-Cüppers, pl. 53, 58, 107.

<sup>20</sup> H. Donner, *ZDPV*, 83 (1967) p. 25-27.

<sup>21</sup> Donner-Cüppers, Pl. 39, 81, 126.

<sup>22</sup> Donner-Cüppers, pl. 41.81.82.126.

saved the Israelites”;<sup>23</sup> cf. Num. 21: 4-9.

The sequence of these biblical events marks the horizon of the Old Testament narratives, to which an allusion could be expected here. The chronological and geographical dead-line, so to speak, is given in Num. 21: 12: because in this text the arrival of the Israelites at river Zared (= *Wādī'l-Ḥasā*) is reported. Therefore, three traditions come into question: 1. the stay of the Israelites at Kadesh Barnea, the death of Miryam, and the water brought forth by Moses out of the rock (Num. 20: 1-13; mentioned by Eusebius, *Onom.* 112: 8-12); 2. how Edom refused passage to Israel (Num. 20: 14-21; not mentioned by Eusebius); 3. how Aaron died on mount Hor (Num. 20: 22-29; mentioned three times by Eusebius, *Onom.* 46, 14-16/126, 19s./176,7s.). Only the items no. 2 and 3 are on the short list, because item no. 1 — Kadesh Barnea — is located much more to the south. But we need not care about this matter, for there is no account in the Septuagint and no item in Eusebius' *Onomasticon* concerning those events, the remnant letters MEΑ, MEΛ or MEΔ could really fit in.

After having tried to find out the supposed inscription in this way, but without any success, we may examine all the items in the Greek Bible and in Eusebius' *Onomasticon* referring to places, towns and villages in the land of Edom, in the southern desert regions and in Moab as well, the latter because topographical mistakes on the mosaic map cannot be excluded. All research, however, doesn't give any result, as far as I can see.

Should not we regard it as hopeless? Or should we say: nothing ventured, nothing gained? Let us step back and look at the mosaic map on the whole and state a simple question: A traveller, a modern tourist for instance, is going from north to south on the east bank of Jordan and east of the Dead Sea, passing *Wādī'l-Mūḡib* and *Wādī'l-Ḥasā*, to what place does he

want to go? He wants to go to Petra, of course. Did travellers in the sixth century A.D. as well? In all probability, they did not. The Christian pilgrims, for example, did not go to Petra, as far as we know.<sup>24</sup> The splendour of Petra had been diminished, its political rank was lost, it had become a provincial town. But it was still situated near the famous ancient royal road, the *via Traiana* from Bostra to Aila; it was the residence of a Christian archbishop, and it is still mentioned in Byzantine literature after the decline of its political power: seventeen times in Eusebius' *Onomasticon*, in the *Descriptio Orbis Romani* by Georgius Cyprius,<sup>25</sup> on the *Tabulae Peutingerianae*<sup>26</sup> and elsewhere. Should not it have been represented on the mosaic map of Madaba as well?

The items on the subject from Eusebius' *Onomasticon* are as follows:

1. 142,7-8: Πέτρα. πόλις ἐν γῆ Ἐδὼμ τῆς Ἀραβίας, ἣτις ἐπεκλήθη Ἰεχθοήλ, ἡ καὶ Ῥεκεμ παρὰ Ἀσσυριοῖς ὀνομάζεται. “Petra, a city in the land of Edom, province of Arabia, which was called Joktheel, which is also named Rekem by the Syrians.”

2. 144, 7-9: Ῥεκεμ, αὕτη ἐστὶν Πέτρα πόλις τῆς Αραβίας ἧς ἐβασίλευσε Ῥοκόμ, ὃν ἀνεῖλον οἱ υἱοὶ Ἰσραήλ. Λέγεται δὲ αὐτὸς βασιλεὺς Μαδιάμ “Rekem, that is Petra, a city of the province of Arabia, which was ruled by Rokom whom defeated the Israelites. The king himself is also called Madiam.”

The place name *Ἰεχθοήλ* is mentioned in II Kings 14: 7: “He (king Amaziah of Judah) slew Edom in the Valley of Salt, ten thousands, and took Seia by war, and called the name of it Joktheel, unto this day.” Eusebius explains this text on *Onom.* 110: 22: Ἰεχθοήλ. Πέτρα ἐν βασιλείαισιν “Joktheel, (that is) Petra in the Books of Kings.” He adds in *Onom.* 72: 28-29, misinterpreting the “Valley of Salt” (in Hebrew *gē hammelah* as if it be a place name: Γημελά. χώρα Ἐδὼμ. Ἄ δὲ καὶ

<sup>23</sup> Donner-Cüppers, pl. 39, 41, 81, 82, 126.

<sup>24</sup> H. Donner, *Pilgerfahrt ins Heilige Land, Die ältesten Berichte christlicher Palästinapilger (4.-7. Jahrhundert)*, Stuttgart, 1979.

<sup>25</sup> 1044: Πετραίη μητροπολις; ed. h. Gelzer (1890) p. 53.

<sup>26</sup> K. Miller, *Die Peutingersche Tafel*, reprint, 1962, 9, 5.

Σύμμαχος φάραγγα αλών “Gemela, land of Edom, but according to Aquila and to Symmachus valley of salt.” Γημελά or, in the Septuagint, Γαιμελε is a mere transcription of Hebrew *gē hammelaḥ* which is treated as a place name, although it is no place name, but the name of a valley.

From all these items we are able to combine or to reconstruct the texts of two inscriptions, both referring to Petra:

- 1.(1)[ΠΙΕΤΡΑΕΝΓΗΕΔΩΜ  
 (2) ΤΗCΑΡΑΒΙΑCΗΚ,ΙΕΧΘΟ  
 (3) ΗΛΗΚ,ΡΕΚΕΜΕΝΘΑΕΠΙΑ  
 (4) ΤΑΞΕΝΜΕCΙΑCΤΟΝΕΔΩΜΕΝΤΗ]  
 (5) ΜΕΛ[A]

(1) Petra in the land of Edom, (2) province of Arabia, also Jokthe- (3) el, also Rekem, where slew (4) Amaziah Edom in Ge(5)mela.

- 2.(1) ΡΕΚΕΜΗΚ,ΙΕΧΘΟΗΛ  
 (2) ΗΝΥΝΠΙΕΤΡΑΕΝΘΑ  
 (3) ΕΠΙΑΤΑΞΕΝΑΜΑCΙ  
 (4) ΑCΤΟΝΕΔΩΜΕΝΤΗ  
 (5) ΜΕΛ[A]

(1) Rekem, also Joktheel, (2) now Petra, where (3) slew Amaziah (4) Edom in Ge(5)mela.

Of course, the exact wording cannot be reconstructed; other slightly varying approaches remain possible. Someone will perhaps prefer other forms of some Greek words: *Ιεκθοηλ* instead of *Ιεχθοηλ*, *Αμασις* instead of *Αμεσσιας*, *Γαιμελε* instead of *Γημελα*. As far as the phraseology is concerned, the reconstruction should be as close as possible to similar inscriptions on the mosaic map of Madaba. Indeed, the mosaic artist preferred an arrangement of longer inscriptions in four or five lines. There are lots of examples for division of words, for short lines at the end and for abbreviations κ(αί)

If Petra was represented on the mosaic map of Madaba, its inscription approximately looked like one of the two suggested reconstructions. But was it represented on the map? I don't know. If anyone has other and better explanations for the two and a half letters ΜΕΛ, ΜΕΛ or ΜΕΔ, he is kindly requested to let me know.

### The Representation of Lower Egypt<sup>27</sup>

Considering the Delta of the Nile we have to make a primary observation: the representation of Lower Egypt totally differs from the other sections of the mosaic map — a matter which scholars usually have not paid attention to.<sup>28</sup> A clear description of the differences is the first step to a pertinent interpretation of this neglected part of the mosaic.

1. The mosaic map on the whole is an illustration of God's salvation history according to the Holy Bible, Old and New Testament. The representation of the Nile Delta, however, does not fit into this principle. It can be recognized by the *desiderata*, i.e. by the lack of important biblical themes which are to be expected on the map. The story of Joseph (Gen. 37: 39-50), e.g., is missing: that story according to which Joseph settled his father's family in the land of Goshen in the eastern part of the Delta, the modern *Wādī at-Ṭumēlāt*. Nothing is reported of Israel's stay in Egypt (Ex. 1-12), of their building the store cities of Pithom and Raamses (Ex. 1:11), of the Exodus from Egypt (Ex. 13-15). The figure of Moses is totally absent, and the crossing of the sea of reeds is not mentioned — the latter, probably, because Byzantine tradition localized this event at the northern point of the gulf of Suez.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, we find no trace of

<sup>27</sup> Cf. H. Donner, *Das Nildelta auf der Mosaikkarte von Madaba*, *Fontes atque Pontes, Ägypten und Altes Testament*, 5 (1983) p. 75-89.

<sup>28</sup> Except A. Schulten, *Die Mosaikkarte von Madaba und ihr Verhältnis zu den ältesten Karten und Beschreibungen des hl. Landes*, *Abhandlungen d. Königl. Gesellschaft d. Wissenschaften*, Göttingen, phil. hist. Kl. IV, 2 (1900) p. 30-33, 103, 115-121; A. Jacoby, *Das Geographische Mosaik von Madaba*, *Die älteste Karte des hl. Landes*, ein

*Beitrag zu ihrer Erklärung*, *Studien über christliche Denkmäler*, 3 (1905) p. 35-43; R.T. O'Callaghan, *loc. cit.* (note 11), p. 696-702.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. the pilgrim's report of the nun Etheria or Egeria (around 400 A.D.), chapter 7: translated into German and explained by H. Donner, *Pilgerfahrt* (note 24), p. 95-99; from the century of the Madaba map: the report of an anonymous pilgrim from Piacenza (around 570), chapter 41 (H. Donner, *loc. cit.*, p. 304-306.

the Prophet Jeremiah's stay in Egypt (Jer. 42-44) nor of the escape of the Holy Family to Egypt (Mat. 2) which is said to have reached Heliopolis or even Memphis.<sup>30</sup> Inscriptions in the style of the mosaic map referring to these biblical themes can easily be invented, e.g.

α) Τάνις, ἔκ ταύτης ἦν ὁ ἅγιος Μωϋσῆς (οἱ ὅθεν ἦν ὁ ἅγιος Μωϋσῆς οἱ ἐνθα/ὄπου ἐτέχθη ὁ ἅγιος Μωϋσῆς "Tanis, whence came Saint Moses (or: where Saint Moses was born);<sup>31</sup>

β) Γεσέμ. (χώρα τῆς Αἰγύπτου) ἐν ἣ κατώκησεν Ἰακώβ ἅμα τοῖς υἱοῖς αὐτοῦ "Goshen (land of Egypt), where Jacob dwelt together with his sons".<sup>32</sup> Such proposals and other ones eliminate the problem for the mosaicist. The question arises: why didn't he do his duty?

2. The main literary source of the mosaic map is Eusebius' Onomasticon of Biblical Place Names. But the mosaicist who used the Onomasticon exhaustively for the Palestinian sections of his map, did not use it for Lower Egypt. Eusebius mentions 10 or 11 items in the Delta of the Nile, the mosaicist 14, but only two of them can be found here and there — namely Sais and Tanis. The same is true with regard to other suggested sources the mosaicist took as a basis: the books of Flavius Josephus, the Bible commentaries of Origenes and St. Jerome, the so-called Διαμερισμὸς τῆς γῆς ("the distribution of the earth"),<sup>33</sup> a.o. We get the following impression: the mosaicist used a small library of important ancient books, but when he began to prepare the mosaic of Lower Egypt, he closed the door of this library and did not use it anymore. Why did he do so, and which sources did he really use for the Delta of the Nile?

3. The mosaic map of Madaba is the most exact example of cartography before

the beginning of modern cartography in the nineteenth century. Naturally, there are some more or less important geographical and topographical mistakes, but they cannot diminish the value and exactness of the map. In the relatively small section of the Nile Delta, however, the accumulation of mistakes and inaccuracies is striking. The sites of both cities Xoïs and Sais have changed: Xoïs was situated near modern *Sahā*, about twenty-four kilometres southeast of *Tall Fara'ūn* (or *Fara'īn*), i.e., east of the Sebennitic arm;<sup>34</sup> and Sais was located near *Kafr az-Zayāt* north of *Ṣā al-Ḥagar* at the arm of Rosette, i.e., west of the Sebennitic arm.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, the Saitic arm is misrepresented on the Madaba map: it did not branch off to the right, i.e., to the east, but to the left, i.e. to the west, seen from the Sebennitic arm. The village HNIKIOY (ἠ Νικίον) is unlocalized; it must have been situated east of the Canopic arm in the Prosopitic district.<sup>36</sup> On the map it is represented too far to the east. The position of Pelusium (*Tall al-Faramā*) was mainly on the east side of the Pelusiac arm;<sup>37</sup> on the Madaba map we find it on the west side. Finally, the Nile Delta is drawn in a false geographical relation to Palestine. The coastline of the Mediterranean Sea really turns west south of Gaza, but on the Madaba map it turns east.<sup>38</sup> This is the same incorrectness as on the so-called map of St. Jerome, a twelfth century copy of a Roman world map originating from the seventh or eighth century. The reason is quite clear. If the mosaic artist would have represented the coast-line correctly, he would have had to abandon the rectangular size of his map: the coast-line going from top to bottom, and the Nile with its arms coming from the right side — totally impossible on a church floor. Moreover, a conflict would have been produced between real geography

<sup>30</sup> H. Donner, *Pilgerfahrt*, p. 309, note 205.

<sup>31</sup> According to Etheria 9,5: H. Donner, *Pilgerfahrt*, p. 102, note 80.

<sup>32</sup> According to Eusebius, *Onom.* 62: 10-11.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. A. Jacoby, *loc. cit.* (note 28), p. 34.

<sup>34</sup> W. Helck, *RE* II, 9 (1967) p. 2152-2155.

<sup>35</sup> H. Kees, *RE* II, 1 (1920) p. 1758-1759.

<sup>36</sup> Perhaps identical with *Ibšadī*, about 8 km. west of

*Sersena*=*Arsinoë/Cleopatris*, or *Kōm Rāzin*, about 9 km. south-west of *Menūf*. see H. Kees, *RE*, XVII, 1 (1936) p. 342-344. The basic note can be found in Ptolemaios, *Geogr.* IV, 5 (§ 49 Nobbe): ἀπ' ανατολῶν πρὸς τῷ Μεγάλῳ Ποταμῷ Προσωπίτης, νόμος, καὶ μητροπολις Νικίου.

<sup>37</sup> H. Kees, *RE*, XIX, 1 (1937) 407-415.

<sup>38</sup> Donner-Cüppers, pl. 38, 84, 122, 124.

and religious geography.<sup>39</sup> For in the ancient Christian tradition the Nile was one of the rivers of Paradise, and the Paradise was situated in the east, according to Gen. 2: therefore the Nile had to run from the east to the west without any regard to the geographical facts, even though people may have known the geographical truth.<sup>40</sup> But the other mistakes cannot be explained in this way. The question arises: did the mosaicist ever see Lower Egypt? And once more: which sources did he use?

As far as the representation of the arms of the Nile is concerned, the second question can easily be answered: it is based on the oldest description of the Delta we know, namely Herodotus, Hist. II, 17:3-6. The text runs as follows: "The Nile intersects Egypt in two, from the cataracts unto its mouth. Until the present city of Kerkasoros it is running as one Nile; after this city it is split into three arms. And the arm going to the east is called the Pelusiac arm (Πηλούσιον στόμα); the other one is going to the west and is called the Canopic arm (Κανωβικὸν στόμα). The arm going straight ahead, however, runs as follows: coming from above (ἀνωθεν φερόμενος) it reaches the top of the Delta; from this point it intersects the Delta, flows into the Sea and keeps a quantity of water which is neither insignificant nor unknown. It is named the Sebennitic arm (Σεβεννυτικὸν στόμα). There are still two other arms, branching off from the Sebennitic arm and running into the Sea: their names are Saitic (Σαῖτικόν) and Mendesic (Μενδήσιον). The Βολβιτινον στόμα and the Βουκολικόν are no real arms, but artificial canals."

The representation on the mosaic map corresponds exactly with this description. There are three small differences only: 1. The name Bulbitic (Βουλβυτικόν) on the Madaba map instead of Βολβίτινον in

Herodotus' description is without parallel. Probably, it is nothing but an error, or the mosaicist used another text of Herodotus than we have.

2. The artist did not distinguish between the "canals" (οὐκτα) and the real arms, the reason of which is clear: he wanted to draw the arms in the Delta symmetrically. There was no need to differ from Herodotus. He only had to interpret him, because Herodotus does not describe how the arms are running.

3. The Mendesic arm, mentioned by Herodotus, seems to be absent. But it can easily be demonstrated that it originally was represented on the map. The inscription Σεβεννυ[τικον] is completely preserved until Y. Of the following letter T two white cubes are still existing, forming part of a horizontal line, the cross-beam of the T. If this cross-beam is lengthened to the left, trying to restore the whole letter T, it becomes clear that the inscription together with the Sebennitic arm slightly deviated to the right. On the other hand, however, the black left limitation-line is slightly moving to the left. From these observations we have to conclude: another arm of the Nile which is not preserved branched off from the Sebennitic arm to the east, i.e., Herodotus' Mendesic arm.

So far, things are clear. According to what principles, however, the mosaic artist chose the cities and villages to be represented in the Nile Delta? Neither according to biblical traditions nor to pilgrims' requirements. Or did he want to portray the Christian Lower Egypt in Byzantine times by giving the ecclesiastical centres and bishops' residences? If it be the case, one could compare the Madaba map with the lists of Byzantine bishoprics, the most important and most complete of which is the *Descriptio Orbis Romani*, written by Georgius Cyprius during the reign of the

<sup>39</sup> Fine examples of religious geography in the pilgrim's report of Etheria: H. Donner, *Pilgerfahrt*, p. 84 (Note 12), 87s, (note 23), 109 (note 97).

<sup>40</sup> Fl. Josephus, *Ant.* I, 1,3: "Finally, the Geon is

running through Egypt and is called 'streaming towards us from the east'; the Greeks call it Nile." Cf. Eusebius, *Onom.* 60, 3-4: Γαιῶν ὁ παρ' Αἰγυπτίους Νεῖλος, ἐκ Παραδείσου μὲν Προϊῶν, κυκλῶν δὲ "πάσας Ἀιθιοπίαν"



emperor Phokas (602-610)<sup>41</sup> The *Descriptio* mentions fifty metropolis cities, the Madaba map fourteen only. Moreover, five of these fourteen cities are not mentioned in the *Descriptio*, and on the other hand, significant bishops' sees are lacking on the Madaba map: e.g., Bubastis, Leontopolis, Naucratis, Taua, Cleopatris, Busiris a.o. In a word, this is certainly no representation of ecclesiastical Lower Egypt in the sixth century.

Consequently, there is no other possibility but to examine the relations of the represented cities to the road system in the Nile Delta. Briefly, there are three main roads, running approximately along the collateral lines of the triangle. We know these roads from the written itineraries, e.g., from the collection of *Itinerarium Antonini*,<sup>42</sup> and from the *Tabulae Peutingerianae*, a Roman road map originating from the third or fourth century and preserved in a medieval copy.<sup>43</sup> The first main road runs from Pelusium to Memphis, the second one from Alexandria to Memphis, the third one from Pelusium to Alexandria. Nobody will be surprised hearing that all cities and villages represented on the Madaba map were situated at one of these main roads, except Thennesos. Thennesos, known from Byzantine and early Arabic sources, was a commercial town and a seaport upon a small island within the lagoon region of *Birkat* or *Baḥr Manzāla*, nowadays *Tall* or *Kōm Tannis*. This town, of course, was connected with

the inland: there must have been roads, although we do not know them, probably to Heracleopolis parva, i.e. Sethroites, or to Tanis, or to both of them. The strange rhombus near Thennesos seems to be a hint of the lagoon region in the north-western part of the Delta.

To summarize: the mosaic artist used the classical description of the Delta, written by Herodotus, and a profane Roman-Byzantine itinerary, the latter not being identical with the *Itinerarium Antonini*, but similar to it. One cannot exclude that he also used a Roman-Byzantine road map. But it seems better to assume that he did not, for the inaccuracies in localizing the places and minor arms of the Nile are more intelligible provided that he did not make use of a map which could have corrected him. It was sufficient to know where the big cities of Pelusium, Alexandria and Memphis were situated; after that, he could complete the representation according to his itinerary.

Finally, the capacity of the mosaic artist is to be admired: using only a few and poor literary sources, and probably without having seen the land, he created the oldest map of Lower Egypt we know, a map which is more reliable than all its successors until the beginning of modern cartography.

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<sup>41</sup> Ed. by H. Gelzer, Leipzig, 1890.

<sup>42</sup> Ed. by O. Cuntz, *Itineraria Romana*, I, 1929. For general information on the itineraria see W. Kubitschek, *RE*, XI, 2 (1916) p. 2308-2663.

<sup>43</sup> Ed. by K. Miller, *Die Peutingersche Tafel*, 1887/88, reprinted 1962. Cf. K. Miller, *Itineraria Romana*. Römische Reisewege an der Hand der *Tabula Peutingeriana* dargestellt, 1916, reprinted 1964.