

Remarks and Observations on the Historical Topography of Jordan

by Prof. Dr. Herbert Donner, Goettingen

As during the last years, the summer-course 1963 of the German Evangelical Institute for Archaeology of the Holy Land spent about two months in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, working and considering some problems concerning the history and topography of Palestine and Transjordan. Annual director was prof. Dr. H. Donner — Goettingen; cooperating fellows were the Drs H.-U Boesche — Goettingen, G. Morawe — Berlin, K. Nandrasky — Bratislava, H. P. Ruger — Tuebingen and P. Welten — Tuebingen. The names of the cooperators will appear in brackets at the end of the paragraphs, in which their special contributions can be read. The final reports will be published in the next volumes of the "Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palastinaverains". H. Donner is preparing the publication of a group of Roman mile-stones with inscriptions, recently found during repair-work on the Amman — Es Salt — road, for the "Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan".

The explorations would not have been possible without the kind encouragement and help of Dr. A. Dajani, Director of the Department of Antiquities, and Mr. Sami Maddah, Inspector of the West Bank, last but not least of our other Jordan friends and colleagues.

In Jerusalem on August 25, 1963, two members of the summer-course gave lectures, honoured by the presence of French, American, British and Jordan archaeologists:

H. Donner, The Enemy from the North. Historical and Archaeological Observations on Isaiah 10, 27b-34.

G. Morawe, The Structure of the "Chronicles of the Chaldaean Kings" and its relations to the chronological Notes of the Books of Kings.

The German Evangelical Institute for Archaeology of the Holy Land hopes to continue some of the reported explorations, especially in the area west of Karak and on the Lisan.

I.

Since the days of A. Musil and F. M. Abel the Peninsula of el Lisan has not been a field of scientific investigation. The present year's summercourse therefore decided to explore the history of settlement on part of el Lisan.

On October 4, 1963, we discovered courses of masonry measuring about 19 by 26 metres on the road from Mazra' to Haditha southwest of 'Ain es Sikkin.

These ruins which the fellahin of the vicinity simply call "Qasr" could be dated to the Roman-Byzantine period according to the pottery found there. About 200 metres to the north-west, there are the remains of a building measuring about 20 square metres. Its walls are 0,50 metres high and 0,90 metres wide. This "Qasr" could be ascribed to the Roman-Byzantine

period on the same ground. 40 metres north of the last-mentioned building the ruins of a third "Qasr" could be detected. Only its northern wall of about 20 metres length is well preserved, its pottery is Roman-Byzantine too. It is likely that all these "Qusur" formed part of a military system.

Further surface exploration in Haditha which is lying on a mighty tell showed that this village has been inhabited during Roman, Byzantine, Early Arab, Mameluke, and post-Mameluke times. Further investigations would be necessary in order to solve the problem of Roman settlements on el Lisan and to verify the possibility of Roman roads on the Peninsula suggested by A. Musil.

(H.-U. BOESCHE)

II.

As in 1961 it had been possible to discover the site of ancient Kallirrhoe (see Annual VI-VII, 1962, P. 90f), we tried to find Baaras (Josephus, Bellum VII, 16,3; Eusebius, Onomastikon 102,25; Madaba Mosaic Map (BA) AROU) on September 26, 1963. According to the entries of the Madaba Mosaic Map possible localizations were either the spring of Wadi Zarqa Ma'in or Hammam Zarqa Ma'in. Surface explorations in the vicinity of 'Ain ez Zarqa led to the conclusion that Baaras could not have been situated here, although traces of ancient settlements are evident north and southwest of the spring (debris on Umm Qal'a with pottery from Early Bronze, Middle Bronze, Iron Age I (?) and II, Roman-Byzantine; on the hill north of the spring there are dolmens, flints and chalcolithic pottery, perhaps Early Bronze too. Hot springs which might have been used for Roman thermal baths, are neither to be found near 'Ain ez Zarqa nor in the Wadi more to the south.

Until further notice we have to take for granted that Baaras is to be identified with Hamman Zarqa Ma'in. This identification relies on the abundant hot springs in this area (the biggest ones among them: Meshra' er Ra'i "shepherd's waterfall" and Meshra' Suleiman Ibn Dawud), on the two reservoirs for water (Birkat) Hanna and Birkat el Amir) and on the literary sources (Josephus, Eusebius, Petrus Iberus).

(G. MORAWE)

III.

On September 21, 1963, we had the chance to explore a big tell near Nablus, which lies on the left side of the road from Nablus to Sabastiya, shortly after having left the township of Nablus. This tell is mentioned on the Map Palestine 1:10000 Sheet 7: Nablus as Tell Sofan. But this must be a mistake, for all questioned inhabitants of the area called the place Tell Sofan. The surface of this tell, hitherto unnoticed, is partly cultivated at present and looks like an oval of about 100 by 80 metres. From west to east one can see a softly raising ramp with a round hill on its eastern end (circumference 37,50 m; diameter 6,50 m), perhaps a Roman-Byzantine watchtower, because there is an accumulation of Roman-Byzantine potsherds worth mentioning. In the neighbourhood of the tell and on its slopes many rock-cut tombs of different ages can be seen, some of them from the Iron Age, others from Roman-Byzantine times. There are two springs 'Ain es Subyan on the east side and 'Ain el Jisr on the north in the bottom of the valley (Wadi Rafidiya); the latter was discovered 4 years ago and now is accessible by steps which lead into an underground pit with plenty of Roman-

Byzantine potsherds. The pottery on Tell Sofar: Early Bronze, some sherds which may be of Middle and Late Bronze origin, masses of Iron Age I and II (among them pieces of big storage-jars), Roman-Byzantine, but two uncertain Arab sherds only.

This tell no doubt was a large and important village in pre-Arab times. But is difficult to propose a reasonable identification with one of the villages known from literary sources, because the name Tell Sofar does not present any similarity to one of the ancient place-names. It is very probable, however, that we have here the native-place of the charismatic leader Gedeon, called Ophra in Manasseh (Judg. 16, 11ss). The geographical situation of Tell Sofar at the western end of the passage between the mountains Ebal and Garizim (at the eastern end Shechem = Tell Balata is situated) fits well the scanty Old Testament notes on Ophra of Gedeon, especially in her role in the time and political activity of Abimelech (Judg. 9). The ceramic evidence cannot prove this identification, but is by no means contrary to it. The disappearance of the ancient place-name is plausible, if the tell is identical with Ophra of Gedeon; for the name Ophra reminded the Arabs of the demon 'afrid and sometimes caused a euphemistic change of the name (compare et Teyiba northeast of Beitin a. o.). Indeed there is near Tell Sofar a plain called 'Imarat Salame "field of peace", but this name can also be translated "fertile land".

(K. NANDRASKY)

IV.

AIA and THARAIS, which on the sixth century Madaba Mosaic Map figure west and southwest of CHARACHMOBA (Karak) and north of river ZARED (Wadi el Hasa), are usually identified with either 'Aina and Dhat Ras or 'Aiy and 'Iraq (formerly Tar'in) respectively. The first of these identifications has to be ruled out on the ground that 'Aina is situated south of Dhat Ras, whereas AIA lies north of THARAIS; the second, however, perfectly fits all geographic requirements and presents a striking similarity of the ancient and modern place-names. This identification has been proposed for the first time by the famous Austrian traveller A. Musil in *Arabia Petraea I* (1907) p. 256ss. Surface explorations on October 3, 1963, produced Early Bronze, Middle Bronze, Iron II, Roman-Byzantine, and post-Mameluke pottery at 'Aiy, and Roman-Byzantine and late Arab potsherds at 'Iraq (which is difficult to explore because of the modern village on the ancient tell) thus proving that both sites were occupied at the period in question.

(H. P. RUGER)

V.

In 1. Sam. 11,8 a village, called Bezek, is mentioned, at which the military forces of the twelve tribes were concentrated by the Benjaminite Saul shortly before fighting against the Ammonites, to relieve the oppressed town Jabes-Gilead. A notice on this village can be found in Eusebius, *Onomastikon* 54, 5-7. The bishop of Caesarea Palaestinae mentions two villages called Bezek, very close each other, situated at the 17th milestone of the Roman road from Neapolis (Nablus) to Skythopolos (Tell el Husn near Beisan).

The village in question has been identified by A. Alt (*Palaestinajahrbuch* 22, 1926, p. 48ss.) with Khirbat Ibbziq northeast of Tayasir. But the problem of the two villages mentioned

by Eusebius remained unsolved. Surface explorations on September 16 and 18, 1963, proved at first that the proposals made by Alt concerning the second village don't come true: Ras el Badd is a natural mountain without any traces of human occupation, and Khirbat Jabaris is too far from Kh. Ibziq (it would have been localized at the 19th mile-stone of the Roman road). Qasr esh Sheikh Ghazal in the neighbourhood of the 17th mile-stone seems to have been a considerable Roman road-station, but no real settlement.

The second Bezek of Eusebius is situated about 1 km north of Kh. Ibziq. There we found another Khirba, called Kh. Ibziq too, very similar to the first one with regard to its situation and appearance. About 200 metres north of Kh. Ibziq II there is a third small Khirba, probably belonging to Khirba II. On Kh. Ibziq I and II can be found plenty of Roman-Byzantine potsherds, several tombs and many old cisterns (some of them used till now). But Arab pottery was found on Khirba I only, on which a small village is growing again. The pre-Roman pottery is apparently hidden underneath the enormous masses of later debris. The problem of dating both ancient villages cannot be solved without excavations. If Kh. Ibziq I is the older one (the Bezel of Saul) and Kh. Ibziq II/III the Roman-Byzantine settlement, we have to suppose the return of the village to Khirba I in the time after the Arab conquest (like Khirbat el Karmal, Ti'innik a. o.). Otherwise the normal change of the settlement took place in Roman-Byzantine times.

(P. WELTEN)

VI,

In the description of the territory belonging to the tribe of Reuben a village without proper name is mentioned, simply called "the town in the midst of the valley" (Josh. 13,16). The description begins with Aroer ('Ara'ir), situated south of Dhiban on the tableland just before its descent into the valley of river Arnon (Wadi el Mujib). Therefore the "valley" of Josh. 13,16 seems to be identical with Wadi el Mujib and the "town" with Khirbat el Hushra, only mentioned by A. Musil, *Arabia Petraea* 1 (1907) p. 94. If this is correct, the Khirba marks the southwest point of the territory of Reuben. But A. Musil has not been on the spot; bedouins showed him the Khirba at the confluence of Wadi el Mujib and Wadi el Heidan from afar, when he crossed the Mujib about 7 km east of it. Musil supposed an ancient road from the north to the south, going along the Dead Sea shore and crossing river Arnon 2 km east of its mouth near Kh. el Hushra. But there is no archaeological evidence neither for the Khirba itself nor for a road in its neighbourhood. The summer-course 1963 tried to fill this gap and to find a way to Kh. el Hushra. Soon it was clear that it would be impossible to go by car along the waters either of Mujib or of Heidan in the bottom of the valleys respectively. Throughout the mountains there are footpaths only, about 7-10 further on from the spot one can reach by car, descending more than 1000 metres. The only possibility to reach the place seemed to be the way from the Dead Sea shore, not penetrating into the mouth of river Arnon, but climbing up along the course of a small Wadi about 1 km south of it. Thanks to the kindness and help of the Jordan army and of the Antiquities Department we had a chance to go by ship to the Ras el Ghor (September 27, 1963). We tried to climb up to the mountains along the bottom of the dry Wadi mentioned above and over the slopes which follow its course to the Wadi el Mujib. But it was absolutely impossible to advance more than some 100 metres, because of the difference in elevation, the danger

of falling stones, the weakness of the marl-banks, and the smoothness of the slopes. Therefore we had to abandon the trial.

From this experience and these observations we have to finish this report with three preliminary conclusions:

1. The western descent of the Transjordan tableland down to the Dead Sea seems to be without any human settlement, not only in the area of Qullat Haruan (see Annual VI/VII, 1962, P. 94) but also around the mouth of river Arnon. The whole terrain is hardly accessible and it is extremely improbable that the "town in the midst of the valley" can be localized there.

2. A. Music has not been at the place of Kh. el Hushra; he saw it from afar. An error or real mistake cannot be excluded; one reminds the fact that sometimes boulders are called Khirba.

3. Thus the problem in question remains unsolved for the present. Further explorations have to continue the search, perhaps in the upper part of Wadi el Mujib or Wadi el Heidan (called Wadi el Wala).

(H. DONNER)