

## ARTICLE V.

## EXCURSION TO THE LAKES EAST OF DAMASCUS.

By Rev. J. L. Porter, Missionary at Damascus.

[THIS Article, like the one on Hermon in the preceding number of this work, is from the pen of one of the Missionaries of the Irish Presbyterian Church stationed at Damascus. Mr. Porter has paid great attention to the topography and antiquities of the district round about that ancient city, and has constructed an accurate map of the region. The present Article gives us the first definite information respecting the lakes and marshes which receive the waters of the Barada and the 'Awaj, the two rivers of Damascus.—E. R.]

*November 17th, 1852.* Long had my mind been set on an excursion to the unknown regions on the east of Damascus; but never till this day was I able to accomplish it. A cessation of hostilities on the part of the government, opened my way. So I got up a strong party, engaged a competent guide, and we set off from the east gate at 6.57. Our party consisted of Messrs. Robson and Barnett, and M. Antón Bulād, a learned monk of the Greek Catholic church.

The air was fresh and frosty, and blew keenly in our faces as we rode along the bank of the Akrahány, a canal from the Barada. Ere long, however, the rising sun dissolved the congealed vapor from the grass and foliage, and lighted up the distant hills, so that they appeared like gigantic gilded domes rising over the forests of the plain. A cloud covered the top of Hermon, and the deep sound of the thunder was heard in the distance; we consequently feared some approaching change. But as the day advanced, every cloud disappeared; and every hill and mountain round the whole horizon, stood forth in bold relief against the clear blue sky. It was a glorious day. But why speak of the weather in the sunny East? Amid the clouds and gloom of old England, or the showers of the Emerald Isle, or the mists of Scotland, the weather may form a topic of conversation. A glorious November day would there be, indeed, a *rara avis*. But in Syria, where for six long months the deep azure of the heavens and the bright beams of the sun are never once dimmed by a passing cloud—why speak here of a glorious day? However, it was glorious even for Syria. The atmosphere was transparent as crystal; a

passing shower had dispelled the quivering haze that looms over the desert during the summer heats; the magic power of the mirage did not convert burning sands and parched plains into placid lakes with verdant isles; nature was seen as it existed.

We followed the ordinary eastern road for some distance, and then, turning a little to the right, passed near Jeramāna, and had Balāt on our right at 7.50. Five minutes later, we entered Melha, where a few columns along the streets, some hewn stones in the walls of the mud houses, and two or three sarcophagi in the gardens, tell plainly of other and more prosperous ages. Eighteen minutes more through orchards and fruitful fields brought us to Zibdin. Continuing in the same course we reached at 8.35 a large fountain called 'Ain Hārūsh. This is the largest fountain in the plain of Damascus. A fine stream flows from it, in a shallow Wady, away to the eastward, and waters five large villages with their gardens and fields.

Our road lay along the left bank of the rivulet. At 8.50 we had on our left, distant ten minutes, the small village Biztqeh, and about fifteen minutes beyond it Harista el-Kantarāh, and further still, beyond the Barada, Tell es-Salahiyeh. At 9 o'clock we crossed the Hārūsh by a good stone bridge, and seven minutes after entered Nōleh. Here I stopped ten minutes to make some observations. Damascus bore from this N. 55 W. This bearing, therefore, indicates accurately the direction of our route hitherto. Tell Salahiyeh bore N. 23 E. We were objects of curiosity to the villagers, whom we found sullen, and unwilling to answer our questions. Some women, who were washing in the stream, stated in reply to me, that they did not know the name of the village; a lie so barefaced that I was astonished at it, even with a two years' experience of Arab character. A black slave at last gave me the information I sought. A few minutes above the village, the Hārūsh is divided into two branches; one branch, that on the south, waters Nōleh, Dulbeh, Judeidē el-Khās, and Kefrein; the other is carried to Harrān el-'Awāmid.

Leaving the village we entered at once on the open plain. The forest-gardens were left behind, the thick shade of the walnut, still fresh and green, was felt no more; and little intervals of waste land began to appear between the cultivated fields. A broad plain was spread out before us, with here and there a village surrounded by its orchards. At 9.45 we had Dulbeh on

our right, distant about twenty minutes; and on our left, about an equal distance, Deir Sulmân, and beyond it, Blalyeh. Leaving the village of Kefrein on our right, we reached Harrân el-Awâmid at 10.50. In the centre of this village, and unconnected, so far as now appears, with any other building, stand three large Ionic columns of basalt. They have pedestals about six feet high; and the height of the whole from the ground to the top of the capital I estimated at forty feet. The circumference of the shaft is eleven feet six inches. One of the columns stands at a right angle to the line of the other two, and the distances between them are not equal. It is impossible to say of what character the building was to which these were attached; but, judging from the proportions and workmanship of these solitary pillars, it must have been of considerable beauty. In every part of the village we observed large quantities of hewn stones, with broken shafts. The place was manifestly one of some importance in former days.

From the roof of the house beside the columns I got a good view of this eastern portion of the plain; and I got my first *near* prospect of the lakes. My attention was now directed, as it had been at Maksûra, to the three ruined buildings beyond them. One of these appeared large and lofty; it bore N. 82 E. The Arabs around us spoke in extravagant terms of their extent, and the beauty of some of the white stones in them. When we proposed to visit them, all refused to accompany us, and said that a hundred horsemen could not conduct us in safety. We heard this with sorrow, for to visit them was one of the objects of our present journey.

Eastward of the village we could now distinguish extensive marshes, with here and there patches of clear water. The marshes commence about a quarter of an hour below the village. On the south they extend to the village of Judeidet el-Khâs, an hour distant, bearing S. 23 W.; and in the opposite direction they stretch away quite to 'Ataibeh, a little over an hour N. 55 E. The whole of this tract is deeply covered with water during the winter and spring months. Small portions become dry towards the close of summer, and by far the larger part marsh. Forests of tall reeds cover nearly the whole surface, and these hide the places where the water is deep and clear; but from the commanding position we now occupied we could still see a number of clear spots. From this cause I could easily understand how

an individual might pay a hurried visit to Harrân, and yet see no lake whatever, and conclude that the whole had dried up. The feathery tops of the reeds were dry enough looking, but by approaching them, as I did in several places, I soon became convinced that there was water. This, then, is the western side of the *Bahret el-Kibkiyeh*, or Southern Lake. The other sides, and its extent, will be considered in their proper place.

We mounted at 10.40, and rode straight to the village of 'Ataibeh. We had the marshes close on our right the whole way; and in some places we were obliged to make a detour to the west, to avoid the deep waters. In thirty-five minutes we forded, not without some difficulty, the principal branch of the Barada, a little above the spot where it flows into a considerable expanse of clear water in the midst of the marshes. Now one point which I had wished to establish was so far ascertained; that is, *that the Barada is not, at least every autumn, exhausted before it reaches this lake.* The present season, too, had been unusually dry; little snow had fallen during the previous winter; and there had been no rain since April, save a slight passing shower. On this account I am inclined to believe the universal testimony of the peasants in this region, that *the Barada always flows into this lake.* Of course I cannot assert this broadly, and generally. If any person had ever examined the several branches of the Barada and found them dry, then his proof would be unanswerable. But this, I think, has never yet been done.

Another point was also now established, namely, that this lake does not always, or generally, dry up in summer. There is not, it is true, any very large expanse of clear water; but there is some, and there are marshes of great extent.

At 12.45 we reached 'Ataibeh, having forded the other principal branch of the Barada just before entering the village. This place is almost completely encompassed with a little lake, and below it are the marshes, with ponds of water at intervals.

Having partaken of a hasty lunch, we left our servants, took a guide, and proceeded to examine the northern borders of the South Lake, and make a hasty survey of the East Lake (*Bahret esh-Shürkiyeh*) which we had not yet seen. We mounted at 2.35, rode round the little sheet of water, and struck nearly eastward over swelling ground. The depression and reeds of the South Lake were close on our right. In half an hour we reached a deep and wide trench, so regular that it

would almost seem to be artificial, though it is not so. It was now dry, but through this in winter and spring the surplus water of the lake on the south flows into that on the north. The distance between them at this point cannot be much less than a mile; though, from the inequality of the ground, they in some places approach nearer; and when the water is very high, in one narrow Wady they actually touch each other. This junction, however, does not make the two lakes one. Judging from the elevation of by far the greater part of the ground, as well as from the statements of the guide, it is my conviction that there is *always* a tract of dry ground between the two, varying from half a mile to a mile in breadth. The depression of the ground on our right was now not less than from thirty to forty feet. We saw several deep wells as we rode along; and our Damascus guide pointed out one, into which he and his horse had once fallen while in pursuit of a wild boar.

At 3.20 we reached a small Tell in great part covered with graves, some of which are of comparatively recent date. This Tell is called Tell Maktel Mûsa, "The hill where Moses was slain." We could hear of no tradition attached to the spot; but the situation corresponds in every respect to the place called Merj Râhet, by Abulfeda.<sup>1</sup> He states that a battle was fought A. H. 64, between the Yementyeh and Kaislyeh, in which Merwâp, the chief of the Yementyeh, gained the victory. The field of battle he describes as being in the Ghûtah of Damascus, toward the east. The ancient tombs, the name of the little hill, and the position, all tend to suggest the idea that this may be the spot referred to by the historian.

From this point 'Ataibeh bore N. W. and Maksûra N. 15 E. The South Lake extended still about an hour and a half to the S. E. by E.; and then the border of it swept round southward. We had from this spot a still nearer view of those strange ruins eastward. On the far side of the lakes, the ground slopes gently upward to the base of the group of conical hills called the Tellûl. The surface is slightly undulating, resembling that between the lakes, and like it, too, nearly covered with large shrubs of the tamarisk. Along this slope, more than half way to the hills, stand the *Diûra*. They are not close together. There must be an interval of at least seven miles between the northern and southern Deir. The centre one is considerably further east than

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<sup>1</sup> Tab. Syr. Ed. Reis. p. 16.

the other. The distance of the nearest, that on the north, I estimated, from this spot, at two hours (our guide said four); and the Tellûl at about four and a half to five hours. The loftiest conical peak of the Tellûl is called *Dûkweh*.

Neither in the plains nor mountains beyond the lakes could I see any other ruins. There are now no inhabitants there; and, so far as I was able to observe and ascertain, there are no ruined villages. The villagers seldom venture beyond the marshes, and the wandering Arabs dread the long guns of these hardy peasants. There is a constant blood-feud between the parties, and this accounts for their unwillingness to go with us beyond their own territory. The *Diûra* are, I think, unquestionably the "places that protect from an enemy," spoken of by *Abulfeda*<sup>1</sup> as situated near the Lake of Damascus. It is probable, that these constituted part of a line of fortresses erected along the eastern border of this region, to check the incursions of the desert hordes. We had before seen a strong fortress east of the village of *Maksûra*, beside a ruined city; and we had likewise observed a small tower some distance south of it. Near the Lake *Heijâny* we shall also see other large ruins, apparently of a similar character.

South of *Tell Maktel Mûsa* is a deeper portion of the first lake, which in winter and spring is filled with water, but now it was nearly dry. This is called *Bahret Maktel Mûsa*. We turned away northward from this little hill to visit *Bahret esh-Shûrktyeh*. In ten minutes we reached another *Tell*, also covered with Arab grayes. The sons of the desert rest here in solitude after a life of wandering. It is very striking in such a place, where there are no traces of man's presence, to find evidences of his mortality. The daring marauder, and the brave warrior, rest here; we rode over their graves in peace, for death had paralyzed the strong arm, and removed from earth the fierce spirit. The *Tell* is encircled by a grove of the tamarisk, which here attains a height of from six to eight feet, and is generally ten or twelve in diameter. It is called *Tûrfa* by the Arabs. This is almost the only product of the soil; which is covered in the intervals with a whitish crust.

In fifteen minutes more we reached the side of the East Lake, now presenting a vast surface of waving canes, with little clear spots, here and there. As the place where we stood was some-

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<sup>1</sup> *Tab. Syr.* p. 157.

what elevated, I was able to form a pretty good idea of its extent. Its southern border stretches away E. by S. for about an hour. It then sweeps round northward with an irregular curve to the east. The breadth to the northern side is about two hours. On our left hand the border runs away to the N. W. for about two hours, greatly indented from the inequality of the ground. The circumference I would thus estimate at nearly ten hours; not at our mode of riding, as I estimated the other lake along the side of which we travelled; but at the usual reckoning of the peasants, making the hour about equivalent to two miles. Our guide assured us that it would require a day to encompass it; and I think he spoke correctly. Taking the rate of progress at two miles an hour, and the day ten hours, this would give a circuit of *twenty miles*, which is near the truth. Our purpose had been to pass between these lakes, visit the Diûra, and then take the route outside the south lake to Heijány. In this it will be seen we were disappointed; but we were, nevertheless, enabled fully to solve the mystery of these lakes, and clearly to see the general features of this region. It may be, that on some future occasion, I shall be enabled to penetrate to the Diûra, and perhaps also scale Tell Dûkweh beyond.

We continued some distance N. W. along the side of the marshes, and then turned into them by a winding path through the thickets of canes. In about fifteen minutes we reached a mound called Tell el-Khanzir, the "Tell of the Swine." Beside this was deep water. Dismounting and leaving my horse, I followed our guide in among the reeds, through which we had difficulty in forcing our way. They are here from twelve to fifteen feet high, and many of them over twenty. I wished to get sight of a wild boar; but, though we found places where they had been recently wallowing, we could see none. As we crouched down listening, the guide told me in whispers, that on the previous year he had lost his way near this spot, and was three days and three nights among the thickets and marshes ere he could get out. I can well believe it, for nothing save a small section of the blue sky can be seen, and, if once the track is lost, the wanderer at once gets entangled among the marshes; and, even should he know something of the right direction, he is forced to turn and wind to avoid the pools and morasses. On hearing this, I at once proposed to go back; as I had no fancy for an adventure in such a place, even with the prospect of enjoying the society

of a few wild boars. Returning to our horses, therefore, we remounted, and set out for 'Ataibeh. We recrossed the dry bed of the connecting canal, and reached the village as the sun was sinking behind the lofty Hermon.

The eastern lake is chiefly supplied with water by the channel above referred to. There is another stream, however, which flows into it from the Barada above 'Ataibeh. It likewise receives the superfluous waters of the large canal called the Taura, augmented by the streams from 'Ain Kossair. These run down from the village of 'Adra into its western extremity. On the north, during the winter, it receives also the stream of the Nahr el-Mukubrit, coming from near Ruhaibeh, on the plain of Jerúd, and passing Maksúra in its course.

When dinner was laid, not on the table, however, we proceeded to discuss the eatables, and at the same time the proposed journey to the Diára. A number of the villagers were now squatting round us, wondering at the facility with which we introduced the little spears (forks) into our mouths; and thinking, no doubt, what fools the *Frangis* are to endanger their faces with such weapons, when they have fingers, and might use them, like other men. The whole proceeding was manifestly to them a mystery, and many a nudge did they give each other, as some new feat was performed with the knife and fork; but their amazement found no expression, save in an occasional muttered "Wullah."

Our Damascus guide was evidently averse to our proceeding farther east. If fear of danger were the cause, as it appeared, he ought undoubtedly to have been the last to give in on that head; for when mounted, he resembled, in the completeness and number of his arms, a well-appointed light field-battery. We tried our own powers of persuasion with the peasants, holding forth strong inducements in the shape of a liberal *bákshish*, to any five men who would accompany us. It was all in vain. Druzes, Arabs, and robbers of all kinds, were now, they said, prowling along the borders of the desert, awaiting a favorable opportunity to plunder and run. We were thus compelled to relinquish our design.

*November 18th.* We returned this morning by the same road we had travelled before, to Harrán el-Amâmid, which we reached at 8.35. Spurring my horse to a gallop, I followed the indentations of the lake, leaving my companions to pursue the direct

route. I found deep water among the reeds at every point. Myriads of wild fowl, geese, ducks, storks, herons, snipes, and many others, rose in clouds and flew around me; while numerous less swift species paddled away along the water, or dived in the pools. Below Harrân one of the branches of the Hârûsh falls into the lake. We rode on to Kefrein, and reached it in fifteen minutes. It bears S. 44 W. from the former. Here we turned a few points to the south, and passed over a fine plain with rich soil, but only partially cultivated, to Judeidet el-Khâs, forty minutes from Kefrein. A branch of the Hârûsh runs past the village and falls into the lake below. As we rode along this last stage, the edge of the marshes was more distant from our path than formerly. I galloped down to them and still found the water as before. The lake from this sweeps round in a curve to the village. A swell in the ground prevents it from going further west, between Kefrein and Judeideh.

I here spent five minutes in taking bearings to fix the position of this village and of the southern boundary of the lake. The extreme southern border of Bahret el-Kibliych is marked by a line drawn from hence E. by S. So far as I could judge from this and from observations made afterward on Tell Heijânî, I would estimate the breadth at an hour and three quarters. It is not quite so wide as at the other extremity. The length of this lake then we have seen to be, from north to south, two hours; and the breadth of it averaging nearly two. This gives a circuit of six hours, which, at our rate of travel, will represent nearly twenty miles, or a little less than the circumference of the other lake.

Leaving Judeideh we rode south straight to Heijâneh. There is a rise of more than thirty feet which we ascended immediately after leaving the former. This swell runs away S. E. by E. and prevents the extension of the lake further south. The soil is here of the finest quality, with a perfectly flat surface. The conglomerate and limestone strata give place to the basalt near Judeideh, and the latter runs unbroken away beyond the mountains of the Haurân. There are in this part of the plain occasional small mounds or Tells, in some of which the black porous rock crops out over the mouldy soil. Here again begins the tamarisk, and another plant called *Kîly* (*Salsola fruticosa*), which is burned, and the ashes used in the manufacture of soap. It is a sapless looking plant of a dusky green color. It somewhat

resembles the rush, but is more straggling and has thicker stems with numerous joints. It grows from twelve to fifteen inches high. It abounds in this part of the plain, also around Maksûra, and in the mountains between that village and the plain of Jerûd.

At 10.23 we reached Heijâny, and rode at once to the summit of the little volcanic hill, that rises up immediately beyond the village. Judeideh bears from this place due north. This Tell commands a fine prospect over the whole surrounding country. On the N. and N. E. is seen the Ghûtah, with its evergreen forests; and the Merj teeming with villages; the flat surface of the lakes, and the undulating ground beyond rising up with an easy slope to the foot of the Tellûl. The two border villages, 'Ataibeh and Maksûra, were now seen in a line, bearing N. 27 E. It is rather singular, that the three most remote villages in this plain should be in a direct line. The group of hills so often referred to, called Tellûl, are three and a half to four hours in length from north to south. The conical peak called Dûkweh, is near the centre of the range and bears N. 83 E. From Maksûra it bore S. 37½ E.; and from Tell es-Salahiyeh S. 70 E. These bearings will fix its position with a pretty near approach to accuracy. Both on the north and south of these hills, the flat surface of the earth stretches away till it meets the horizon. From the southern extremity of the Tellûl to the commencement of the Jebel Haurân, about S. 13 E., there is also an unbounded plain. Only one solitary blue peak, rising up in the far distance, S. 62 E., breaks the uniformity; this peak, our intelligent guide informed me, is in the centre of the *Safa*. On the south a vast plain extends to the base of the Haurân mountains. The villages of Heit and Hiyât were pointed out, and appeared as black spots on the hill side; and I distinctly saw a lofty Tell, forming the northern extremity of the Haurân range; and on visiting that region afterwards, I at once recognized it as Tell Ma'az, near the ruins of Bathanyeh, the ancient *Butanæa*. On the S. W. we could overlook the rolling plain to the Lejah; and, far away, above the flat rocky surface of this district, rose a blue peak, which I afterwards identified as Tell Amâm, beside the village of 'Ahiry.

More to the west the view was shut in by the heights of Mânî'a. The eastern termination of this range bore S. 80 W. The villages of 'Adaliyeh and Hurjilleh, in the valley of the 'Awaj,

between Māni'a and Jebel el-Aswad, were visible, bearing N. 78 W. This bearing, too, marks the *general* direction of the river 'Awaj.

The Lake Heijāny lies on the S. and S. E. of the Tell. It extends about two hours southward, but towards the east not quite so far. Its circumference I estimated at about five hours. It was now entirely dry, but the waving reeds and the color of the soil marked distinctly the boundaries of the water during the winter. We were informed that it rarely dries up completely. The river 'Awaj enters this lake at its north-western angle, about twenty minutes below the place where we stood. I could plainly trace its winding course through the undulating plain, from the spot where it passes out from between the hills above mentioned. Its bed was now quite dry to near that point. A winter torrent, called the Liwa, falls into the S. W. corner of this lake. Its source is near the village of Himreh in the Ard el-Bathanyeh. From thence it runs westward in a deep Wady to Shuhba, where it sweeps round to the north and follows the indentations of the Lejah to its N. E. angle at Burāk; there it turns more to the east, and winds across a fine plain to the lake. It only flows when the snow is melting in the mountains, or heavy rain is falling. I travelled along it in February last from Burāk to near its source, and only found water, here and there, in pools.

About half an hour south of Tell Heijāny is a small mound covered with ruins, called Kaserein; and beyond the lake, S. 15 E., is another much larger mound with ruins on its summit, said to resemble the Diūra. It is called Mastabel. There are likewise some ruins on a rising ground in the centre of the lake, called Beitariyeh. What is the character, and what were the objects of these buildings? Standing just beyond the border of civilization, the idea is suggested, Were they not fortresses to repel and prevent the incursions of the wandering tribes? Nothing but an examination of them can solve this query. If meant for defence, they are badly situated; for, instead of being in a line and at regular intervals, they are either grouped together, or placed the one behind the other.

The whole of this vast tract, south and east of the lakes, is now without a settled inhabitant. The Arabs roam over it freely. In the autumn it is parched and desolate, but in spring there is excellent pasturage; and then it is almost covered with the wide-spreading flocks of the Beni-Sūkr and Wulid 'Aly.

I had now completed my survey of the eastern part of the plain of Damascus. I had visited the three most distant villages, Maksûra, 'Ataibeh and Heijâny, and had travelled some miles beyond the first and second. The impressions I had formerly received from the statements of natives, I found in part correct, and in part incorrect. It is true there are *three* lakes, and that those into which the Barada falls do not dry up. It is also true that the Lake Heijâny never meets the Bahret el-Kibliyeh, for there is high ground between them at least an hour in breadth; and that, though the east and south lakes communicate, yet they never unite so as to form one. It is true that there are strange large ruins in the Lake Heijâny, and beyond the others. But it is not true that there are villages and inhabitants there. The information I previously got from Mr. Barnett, was strictly accurate, so far as it went; with the exception of the bearings, which I found often very incorrect.

The guide whom we took from the village Heijâny to the summit of the Tell, was very intelligent. He informed us that he had been with the Arabs in the *Safa*; and said that this district was like the Lejah, but larger, and more difficult of access. There are no hills around it, but a wall of jagged rocks. He added, that, if there were only water in it, the world could not expel the Arabs from its fastnesses, or go in to them. He pointed out to me the peak, which, he said, was in the centre of the rocks. The position of this differs very greatly from that given in Appendix, No. 6, to Burckhardt's Travels in Syria; where it is said that the "northern part of the Jebel Haurân is called Es-Safa." Now the Jebel Haurân terminates toward the north at Tell Ma'az, which bears from Heijâny about S. 13 E.; whereas the hill in the Safa bears S. 62 E., and must be at least a day's journey N. E. of the northern extremity of the Haurân mountains. It is, as I was informed, more than a day's journey from Heijâny. During my excursion in the Haurân in February last, I made particular inquiries as to the position of the Safa, when I visited Hit and Shuka; and I was there informed, that it is a *day's journey N. E.* of these places. Had it been where Burckhardt, or his editor, has placed it, and where Berghaus has sketched it on his map, I must unquestionably have seen it; for from the height above Bathanyeh I overlooked the whole of the plain from the west to within a few points of the east. I have no hesitation in stating, that this singular district is not where

Burckhardt has described it, and Berghaus has laid it down. I also feel confident that its true position is as I have stated above.

Another statement in the Appendix of Burckhardt is likewise incorrect. He says: "At the end of the Ghûtah or Merj of Damascus begins the *Jebel Haurân*, which takes a south direction." The end of the Ghûtah is only two hours from Damascus, and the Merj terminates at the lakes, where there are no mountains whatever. The nearest are the Tellûl, about four and a half hours distant. From Tell Heijâny to the northern part of *Jebel Haurân* is about *eleven hours* of an unbroken plain. The mountain ridge on the north of the plain of Damascus runs along the edge of the desert to Palmyra; but I have never heard the name Ruak applied to it. The name given to me at Maksûra was *Jebel el-Kaus*. Berghaus, while endeavoring to follow Burckhardt, has yet applied the name Ruak to quite another range of hills, lying between the plains of Jerûd and Yabrûd. He has not at all laid down the real Ruak of Burckhardt, which is a parallel range but much further southward. The *Jebel el-Abiad*, referred to in the Appendix above mentioned, is the lofty mountain-chain on the north side of the great plain, that extends from Palmyra to Kuryetein.

Such, then, is the physical aspect of this region, so far as I have had opportunity of exploring it. My opportunities have been certainly greater than those enjoyed by most travellers; for I have traversed the whole country from Palmyra to Bozra along the borders of the deserts. I feel, however, that there is still much to be done in the way of careful survey.

Returning from the Tell to the village, we partook of a hasty lunch, and mounting our horses rode towards Damascus. We started at 1.5, and continued for an hour across a fine plain in a direction N. 72 W. The 'Awaj was only a short distance on our left, but the bed of the stream was hidden from view by the inequality of the ground, and the tamarisk shrubs that almost completely cover it. We then swept round the base of a low Tell and rode straight to Ghuzlaniyeh, which bears from Heijâny N. 55 W. We reached it at 2.20, having crossed two little canals that bring to this place the water of the 'Awaj. Another half hour brought us to Karahta, in a line with the two former villages. We here turned S. 65 W., skirting a high mound, and struck across a well-cultivated plain to Tell Sultân Abn-Yezid, the summit of which we reached at 3.15.

This is the loftiest Tell on the plain of Damascus, and having a Wely on the summit, it forms a prominent point in taking bearings, or making a survey. It is also important as commanding a distinct view of the windings of the lower part of the river 'Awaj. The village of Nejha, at the eastern extremity of Jebel el-Aswad, appeared almost at our feet. It is about half an hour distant. Beyond it, fifteen minutes, is the 'Awaj, just leaving the vale between the latter ridge and Mâni'a. Half an hour further down it turns suddenly to the N. E. and sweeps round the base of a little hill, and then meanders across the plain to the lake. The meadows between Nejha and the bend of the river presented a gay and animated picture. A few battalions of Turkish soldiers were there encamped; while little parties wandered along the stream, or galloped about in the exciting exercise of the Jerid. These soldiers were posted here to check the incursions of the rebel Druzes into the plain of Damascus.

The ridge Jebel Mâni'a sinks down into a broad swell opposite Nejha, and is here crossed by the road that I afterward travelled to the Haurân. This swell soon after descends to the level of the plain.

We left at 3.30, passed Kübr es-Sit, fifteen minutes on our left, at 4.30, reached Akraha twenty-five minutes after, and entered the east gate of the city at 5.40.

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#### EXCURSION TO KESWEH.

*January 28th, 1853.* We left the city at 9.45 by Buwâbet Ullah, "The Gate of God," and rode along the Haj road, now, in part, covered with water from the recent rains. In fifteen minutes we had on our left Kübbet el-Haj, a tomb and small mosk around which the Mecca pilgrims spend the first night of their journey. On the opposite side of the road is the large village of Kadam. At 10.25 we saw on our left, a quarter of an hour distant, Sabnet es-Sughra, and ten minutes south of it, Sabineh. Twelve minutes afterwards we crossed a small stream running, in a deep artificial channel, toward the former little village. Its waters are collected, some distance westward, by means of a subterranean aqueduct. A quarter of an hour further we crossed another small stream called Nahr Sabineh from the village which it waters. It, too, is collected like the former, to the west of Ashrafiyeh. In eight minutes more we came to

the Berdy, a stream in every respect like the preceding, It does not rise on the side of Hermon, as represented in Berghaus's map; nor at Katana, as laid down on Burckhardt's. Its waters are collected like the two already mentioned; and the head of its canal is just twenty minutes west of the road, and five minutes above the Druze village Ashrafiyeh. It never flows either to the lakes of the Barada, or the lake Heijany; it waters the village Baweidah, about an hour east of the road, and is exhausted in the gardens and fields below it. This stream has no more right to be inserted in a map than a hundred others in different parts of the plain.

A smart canter of eight minutes from the Berdy, brought us to the foot of Jebel el-Aswad. The great Haj road so far is wide and good. It is wide, like most other roads on the plain of Damascus, because there are no fences along its sides, and the mules and camels are rather erratic in their progress; and it is good, just because it is impossible for it to be bad, the plain being flat and the ground firm. It runs from the city gate in a straight line S. 28 W. to the base of the hills. Here it turns a little westward, skirting a hill on the left. On reaching the top of the gentle slope it turns again nearly due south. The road along the whole of this elevated ground is covered with loose fragments of trap-rock. On its eastern side the hills rise up suddenly, but not precipitously; while on the right the ground slopes away gradually into a fine fertile plain. A low spur shoots out westward from the place where the road begins to ascend, and separates this from the main plain. The village of Sahnaya, twenty minutes distant, stands at its extremity.

The low range of Jebel el-Aswad runs from this eastward to Nejha, and is intersected diagonally by three distinct Wadys. The breadth of the base of these hills is from one half to three quarters of an hour, and the greatest elevation above the plain does not exceed 500 feet. On the western side of the Haj road the main body of the hills appears as if it had been lifted from its place and set down half an hour further south. The vale above mentioned occupies its place. The ground immediately on each side of the road is stony, but does not present the rugged appearance one would suspect from reading Burckhardt.<sup>1</sup> The Meghâret el-Haramiyeh, or "Robbers Cave," mentioned by the same writer, is not very remarkable, and any traveller might

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<sup>1</sup> Travels in Syria, p. 53.

well be excused for passing it unnoticed. Perhaps I should have done so, had it not been that a negro shepherd was standing beside it, and occasionally turning the wanderers of his flock, by slinging stones at them. The precision with which he could throw his missiles with this apparently unmanageable instrument, afforded a good illustration of that striking incident in the life of David, when the champion of Gath fell before him.

At 11.30 we commenced the gentle descent into the vale of the 'Awaj, down which we could see to Nejha. 'Adalyeh and Hurjilleh were both in sight on the right bank. The road here runs S. by W. along the foot of the hills to Kesweh. These hills are sometimes called Jebel Kesweh. They are not regular like a chain, but are rather composed of a clump of conical peaks with narrow vales between. At 12.10 we reached Kesweh. The village stands on the north bank of the stream.

The 'Awaj approaches this place from the west, flowing in a deep and tortuous channel. On its southern side is an elevated rocky plateau, that extends nearly as far east as the Haj road. It then gives place to a fertile plain called Ard el-Khiyarah. On the same side of the river, E. by S. of the village, rise up suddenly the lofty peaks of the Jebel Mâni'a. The highest summit is in part isolated and resembles a truncated cone. As this is a conspicuous object from the whole plain of Damascus, I was anxious to ascend it. We accordingly got a guide, and crossing the river by the fine stone bridge, were on the top in forty minutes. A large fortress stood here in ancient times, but is now heaps of ruins. The view is magnificent, embracing the whole district of Wady el-'Ajam, the plain of Jeidûr, the Lejah to the Jebel Haurân, and the vast expanse from Damascus to the Tel-lûl. My attention was especially confined to the 'Awaj. It lay spread out before me from Sa'sa' to the lake. First running N. E. toward Damascus, then turning and flowing in a serpentine course to Kesweh, where, fringed with willows and poplars, it makes a graceful curve northward round the base of the hill at my feet, and meanders through the meadows of the vale to Nejha. A canal taken from it at Kesweh, and carried along the slopes, waters Adalyeh and Hurjilleh with their gardens and orchards.

After roughly sketching the whole panorama, and taking bearings of the principal villages and points, we descended and galloped back to Damascus.

*Damascus, May, 1853.*