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ARTICLE I.

EXCURSION FROM DAMASCUS TO YABRÚD, ETC.

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

In attempting to explore the eastern part of Syria, which has hitherto scarcely been entered upon by the geographer, I have pursued a regular plan. I marked out a series of excursions in different directions, to be undertaken when circumstances would permit, or a regard to health required a short respite from more severe studies. My object has been threefold: first, to become acquainted with the state and character of the people; second, to note the topography, physical features, and antiquities of the country; and third, to make such surveys as would enable me to construct a map.

My plan, laid down some two years ago, is now nearly completed as far as regards the "Environs of Damascus." The Wady of the Barada and the route by Neby Shít to Ba'albék were first examined. Then the valleys of Helbón and Menin, with the mountain-chains and groups near them. After this, I went to the summit of Jebel esh-Sheikh, and glanced at the southern section of Antilebanon, the sources of the river A'waj, and the western parts of the plain of Damascus. The substance of my observations upon all these has been already communicated to you.

My next journey was to Saidanâya and Yabrūd, returning by the Aleppo road to Kutaifeh, and then crossing the mountains to Maksûra in the eastern plain, on the borders of the desert; and thence to Damascus. No part of this route has ever been accurately described, so far as I know; and the latter part of it has never been traversed by Frank travellers. During this excursion I was enabled to explore the central-eastern section of Anti-lebanon, and the north-eastern division of the plain of Damascus. I afterwards proceeded to the lakes east of Damascus, all of which I carefully surveyed, taking bearings from different points. The central and eastern portions of the plain here occupied my attention, with the lower part of the river A'waj. My last ride was to the summit of the lofty conical peak on the south bank of the A'waj, called Tell Mâni'a. This is a conspicuous object, and commands a fine view over the surrounding country.

Two other much longer journeys which I made have also afforded me additional opportunities of ascertaining the leading features of the Environs of Damascus. The first was to Palmyra, more than two years ago; the other to the Haurân in January, 1853. In the latter, I went by the eastern end of the ranges of Jebel el-Aswad and Jebel Mâni'a, and across the plain to Burâk on the north-east corner of the Lejah. Thence I travelled along the east side of the Lejah southward to the mountainous region called *Ard el-Bethenyeh*. I returned by the western border of the Lejah, Deir 'Aly, and Kesweh.

The present Article contains my notes on the Excursion to Saidanâya, Yabrūd, and Maksûra.

*October 19th, 1852.* Our little party, consisting of Mr. Robson, Mr. Barnett, myself, and one servant, assembled this morning at daybreak; and were soon after on horseback. The streets were still in a great measure deserted as we rode along; and the rickety-looking doors and shutters of the little shops did not improve the appearance of the narrow and crooked streets. They are miserable enough, even when the choicest wares and the richest fruits are displayed, and animated groups fill almost every spot. But then there is a picturesqueness in the costumes, and a gayness about the tinsel ornaments, and a feeling of romance withal attached to the whole, that withdraws the attention of the stranger from the dirt and dilapidation that seem to be universal. It gives me no little amusement now to read the

glowing descriptions of Eastern Bazârs by Western poets. I sometimes wonder too, what these enthusiastic travellers would say, if they had a peep into a Bazâr at morning prayers; or if they had lived for a couple of years in constant intercourse with "the stately Turk," and in close contact with "the graceful flowing robe."

At 6.10 we passed through Bâb Tûma (Thomas' Gate) and followed the usual road to the village of Burzeh, at the entrance of Wady Ma'raba, which we reached in one hour. Here tradition fixes the place where Abraham turned back from pursuing the kings that had plundered the cities of Sodom, and carried off Lot. The Muslims have a Wely beside the village, to which they make annual pilgrimages during the two great feasts; and where their holy Sheikhs perform miracles by riding over the prostrate bodies of the 'faithful' without inflicting any injuries upon them! Leaving the principal part of the village upon our left, we crossed the rivulet formed by the united waters of Mentn and Helbôn, and continued in the same course N. 11 E. till we reached the foot of the range of hills, which bounds the plain of Damascus on the north, at 7.20. At this place we turned a few points to the west in ascending. The road is ancient, and in some places cut deeply in the chalky rock. Having surmounted the lowest ridge, we arrived, at 7.30, at the head of a narrow valley that lies between it and the main chain. The former strikes off from the latter at this spot; and the valley is thus shut in by their junction on this side. It is, however, open on the north-east, where, at the distance of about an hour, the low ridge terminates. An ancient aqueduct is brought along the slope of the hills from the north-east into this little valley; and, as there is no outlêt for it here, it must have been intended for irrigation only.

From this place the road led up a steep mountain-side of bare white limestone. There are still traces of an ancient zigzag path, about eight feet wide, with steps hewn in the rock at intervals. It resembles at a short distance a long staircase. At 7.50 we reached the summit of the hills. The view behind us was now splendid, including the richest part of the plain of Damascus, with its many streams glittering in the morning sun, and the domes and minarets of the city rising gracefully from the midst of the dense foliage. In front of us was the valley of Mentn, and the numerous little wooded vales that run into it around the village of Tell. That village itself stood forth promi-

nently, crowning a little hill, and surrounded by orchards and gardens. Below it, a little to the left, we could see the white dome of the Wely at Hurneh. A gentle slope leads into an elevated undulating plain, the eastern portion of the Sahra. We crossed it diagonally. It is not barren at this place, though somewhat stony. The inhabitants of Tell and Hurneh cultivate a considerable portion of it; and, though not watered, save by the winter rains, it yields a scanty crop of wheat. We saw here several troops of gazelles; one of which crossed our path so near us, that by spurring my horse I was enabled to ride into the midst of them.

Our course across the plain from ridge to ridge was N. 26 E.; and we had Hurneh and Tell about forty minutes on our left hand. At 9 o'clock we began the ascent of the shelving ridge on the north side of this plain, and wound our way, by a zigzag path, to the summit in twenty minutes. From this spot we had a commanding prospect of the whole plain of the Sahra, and the lines of hills on each side of it. We could also look over the *Salahiyyeh* range into the *Ghûtah*, to the *Jebel Mâni'a* beyond it, and to the blue mountains of the *Haurân*, far away on the borders of the desert. The plain of the Sahra becomes quite narrow towards the east, and is more uneven; the spurs from the converging ridges sometimes meeting each other. About a mile to the east of where I stood, this mountain-range attains its greatest altitude. It is here, as elsewhere, very remarkable in its features. On the north side there is a gentle slope from the summit to the base; but on the south there is an almost unbroken wall of naked rock, with a steep, shelving bank from its foot to the plain below. It thus resembles the rampart and scarp of a vast fortification. From this spot *Saidanâya* bore N. 24 E., *Wely Naser*, behind *Salahiyyeh*, S. 36 W., and *Menin*, N. 78 W. I took several other important bearings; but it is not necessary to insert them.

We left this position at 9.50; and, after a descent of seven minutes, reached the head of a sweet vale, completely clothed with vines. It runs into the basin of *Menin*; which, seen down the vista, encircled by lofty precipices, and surrounded by a belt of dense foliage, presented a fine picture. Skirting the mountain side, through the vineyards, at the head of the valley, and crossing a low broad swell, we reached the plain of *Saidanâya* at 10.20. We now saw the village of *Ma'arra* about fifty minutes

on our right, at the foot of the slope; while over it a little to the right rose the lofty summit of Tinlyeh. The plain is here perfectly level, with a deep rich soil, and well cultivated. We crossed it diagonally; and, as we approached the northern side, had the village of Telfita about twenty-five minutes on our left, on the side of the mountain. At 11.2 we had passed the plain, and began to ascend a low but rocky spur from the mountain, turning gradually eastward as we proceeded. On the top is a square solid structure, built of hewn stones, and resembling the pedestal of a monumental column. There are no ruins near it. Descending a little from this spot we reached Saidanâya at 11.12.

Saidanâya is situated on a mass of rugged rocks, in the centre of a wide ravine. The convent, or nunnery, is built on a lofty ledge, which rises high above the houses of the village. The only approach to it is by a flight of stairs hewn in the rock, which leads to a low narrow gate covered with sheet iron and thickly studded with nails. This admits to a narrow passage, that opens into a hall, from which long galleries branch off to each side. We passed through the hall into an open area in front of the church. This church is not of great antiquity. In front on the west is a portico of four short columns supporting arches, instead of an entablature and pediment. The doorway is small and quite plain. In the interior there is a nave and side aisles, separated by ranges of columns, four in each range. In the eastern end are several apartments for the officiating clergy; and immediately behind the altar is a small lady chapel, containing the wonderful and wonder-working image of the "Blessed Virgin." The whole walls are covered with paintings, most of which would about equal, in point of merit, the first attempts at art by a school-boy with a charred stick on a white wall. As I have some little taste for the fine arts, I was anxious to examine these rare specimens. I therefore employed an attendant priest as cicerone; and, with his assistance and explanations, proceeded to unravel the mystic legends detailed on canvas. I have visited most of the galleries of London, Berlin, Vienna, and Venice; and have seen some pictures in them which do not evidence a very pure taste or a very high standard of morality; but never has it been my lot to see such disgusting obscenity, as that portrayed on the walls of this sacred retreat of chaste ruins.

Saidanâya is the holiest shrine of the Virgin connected with

the Greek church in Syria. The priest assured us that it contains a portrait of "The Mother of God," painted by Luke the Evangelist, one half of which is stone and the other half flesh! He did not, of course, explain how a *painting* could be of such materials. The building resembles a fortress, and must be of considerable antiquity. About the year 1330, Sir John Mandeville appears to have visited this place. He calls it Sardenak, and says it is five miles from Damascus. His description of its position and appearance is quite correct; and, from his statement, it seems the very same miracles were then ascribed to this strange image of the Virgin, that we now hear of.<sup>1</sup> Maundrell, likewise, journeyed hither from Damascus. He says, the convent was first established by the Emperor Justinian. In the sides of the precipice, beneath the walls, are some excavated tombs, a few of which have short Greek inscriptions.

From the roof of the convent I had a fine view of the surrounding country. The rocky mountain-chain, on the slope of which it is built, begins at Helbôn and runs east by north toward Saidañaya; at a point due north from which, distant about half an hour, is its loftiest peak, called Mar Shurabîn, i. e. Saint Cherubim! from a chapel on its summit. Eastward of this the ridge gradually sinks down into the plain. The elevated plain of Saidañaya commences near Mentn, and runs parallel to the mountains. It is about half an hour wide. On the southern side of it, the hills rise with an easy slope and are cultivated to the summit. From this place I took important bearings. I only insert such as I think may tend to make more clear to the general reader, the topography of the district. Ma'arra, S. 21 E., distant half an hour. Bedda, eastward of the former and on the same side of the plain, S. 73 E. The summit of Jebel Tiniyeh, S. 74 E. Hermon, appearing from this like a beautiful cone, towering high above the neighboring mountains, S. 62 W.

We started again at 1.10. As we rode down the slope, there was on our right a square building, now called the Church of St. Paul. It is evidently of Roman origin. It is about forty feet in the side, and thirty high. It has a projecting base and a plain cornice. The door, which is on the south side, is ornamented with mouldings and a pediment. It struck my companions as resembling the lower part of the pillar of Hürmül. It is also in form and workmanship like the lower stories of some of the

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<sup>1</sup> Travels, London, 1839, p. 124.

tombs at Palmyra; and I have since seen a building in every respect similar at the village of Hit in Haurân.

Descending the eastern slopes from the village we again entered the plain, and rode along the base of the mountains through vineyards, and orchards of fig-trees. At 1.27 we passed a road which branches off to the left over the hills to Renkûs. At 1.55 we were about opposite the village of Bedda; and here the plain widens considerably by the mountain range on our left, decreasing in breadth as well as in altitude. From hence it is little more than a broad swell. The plain which was quite flat opposite Saida-nâya, is now undulating, and the soil more stony and less fertile, though still cultivated. The direction of our route, which had been hitherto N. 70 E., now turned more to the north.

At 2.35 we saw on the opposite side of the plain the gardens and threshing-floors of Hafir. The village itself is situated in a little Wady, and was not visible. It is in a line with Ma'arra and Bedda. In fifteen minutes more we came to a well, and saw the village of 'Akaubar about a quarter of a hour on our right, in the plain. Crossing a swell, the termination of the Saida-nâya mountains, we passed on the left of a small ruined village called Mukhba at 3.10; and twenty minutes afterwards stopped for lunch, sitting down on the parched ground at the side of the path. We had no shade, and no water; but we had delicious grapes and savory viands from the city; and we had all been too long accustomed to Syrian travel to feel much the want of chairs and tables. There was little of interest in the landscape to call the attention; a bleak plain and barren hills filled up the view. Before us, about forty minutes distant, rose up two isolated Tells, one of which is crowned with a tomb called Wely Hâbes. The summit of Jebel Tintyeh bore S. 5 E. and that of Shurabln S. 70 W. The small village of Tawâny lay about twenty minutes on our left, bearing nearly east. Behind us was a lofty wall of rock extending, unbroken, eastward and westward as far as we could see.

We were again in the saddle at 4.10; and, leaving Tawâny on our right, we gradually approached the gigantic barrier on our left. In passing over a rising ground, we found the whole plain covered with flocks of sheep and goats. Herdsmen from the mountains of Kurdistan were driving them to the market at Damascus. The dress of these men is strange, and far from pictu-

resque. They wear high conical caps, and square-shaped stiff felt coats, which stand out on each side at the shoulders as if supported on the extended arms. These coats are just sufficiently open in front to display the butts of a pair of formidable pistols and the hilt of a heavy scimitar, with a profusion of knives and dirks. When seen at a little distance, they might be easily mistaken for fragments of gray rock, so strange and rigid are their forms, and so uniform their color. The goats, too, are not less curious than their masters; large and shaggy, with spiral horns out of all proportion. These, if straight, would in some cases measure four feet in length; and, twisted as they are, many of them from tip to tip cannot be less than five feet.

At 5.7 we approached the cliffs, and entered a narrow and wild gorge, through which a small stream of water forces its way. A road was once hewn in the rock through the pass, and many of the steps can yet be seen; but during the lapse of ages immense masses of rock have fallen down from the lofty overhanging cliffs, and now almost completely block up the way. It is in some places so narrow that loaded animals cannot pass between the precipices. When riding along I could nearly put a hand on each gigantic wall. No description could convey a true impression of the rugged grandeur of that ravine. After eight minutes winding through it, we suddenly found ourselves in the midst of a little village, whose houses were perched on the sides of the rocks and cliffs around. The dark openings to vast numbers of sepulchral tombs were seen below, above, and among the houses; and gave to the whole a strange, unique appearance. My companions thought we had reached Mu'lila, and inquired for the convent; but, to their surprise, they were informed it was still a good hour off, and that this was Jubb 'Adin. We would fondly have lingered for a time to examine this romantic spot, whose antiquity is evidenced by its sepulchres hewn out on high (Isa. 22: 16); but night was approaching, and our path not very well known; so we were forced reluctantly to take a hasty glance around the cliffs and ride off.

Jubb 'Adin is situated in a little basin, just behind the rocky crest of the mountain range. The cavity seems as if it had been hollowed out by the action of the water which breaks through the fissure; and which in a long course of ages has gradually worn away the soil and carried it into the plain below.

We struck up the eastern side of this basin in a direction

parallel to the line of the hills, and then descended into another in every way resembling the former, but considerably larger. This also communicates by means of a narrow pass with the plain. Through it runs the principal road to Yabrūd. We crossed the road in the bottom of the glen at 5.35. A similar ascent and descent brought us to the convent of Ma'lûla, which we reached at 6.15. We were received with every demonstration of respect by the worthy old superior, with whom we were well acquainted. Coffee was soon served, and some Damascus friends were introduced; in conversation with whom time passed pleasantly and profitably. An excellent dinner was spread for us in a private apartment, set apart exclusively for our own use; and we all did ample justice to the viands. The night was cold, and a strong wind whistled through the corridors and terraces of the old building. When our beds were spread, the moaning of the breeze acted as a lullaby; it was like the wildly plaintive music of my native land; and it brought sleep in the midst of a crowd of pleasing associations and tender reminiscences.

*October 20th.* As soon as there was sufficient light to reveal the features of glen, and crag, and peak, we set forth to examine and explore. Both my companions had been here before; and I thus reaped the benefit of their previous visits. The position of this village and its convent is so striking and peculiar, that I will attempt to describe it. Behind the mountain-ridge is a semi-circular cavity, with furrowed, cup-like sides. The diameter at the top is about two miles. The rocky crest of the mountain rises up in front, a sheer precipice; and, the whole soil having been swept away from it behind to the bottom of the cavity, it rises from thence to the summit at an angle of about fifty degrees. In this gigantic barrier there is a break; with perpendicular sides, wide in front and narrowing backward to about three hundred yards. Toward the back of this opening is a ledge of rock, with a precipice in front more than a hundred feet high, which almost completely blocks it up; leaving only a ravine on each side, in some places not more than three or four feet wide. On the summit of this ledge stands the convent; and in front of it along the foot of the cliff are the straggling houses of the little village of Ma'lûla. The whole rock around the convent, and the precipices around the village, are completely filled with artificial caves. These were, no doubt, at first intended for tombs, but at a later period they were evidently inhabited; and, from their extent and

proximity, suites of comparatively spacious rooms were formed, by opening doors of communication. I had heard much of these sepulchral caves, but without personal inspection I could have formed no adequate idea of their number and character. The whole cliffs and slopes around are like honey-combs. In one of these caves we found a wine-press in full operation. The wine made here under the superintendance of the monks is deemed the best in Antilebanon.

The convent belongs to the Greek Catholic church, and formerly contained some very ancient and curious Syriac manuscripts, now in Damascus. At the foot of the rock, on the east side of the ravine below, is another convent dedicated to Saint Thakla. The village is inhabited by Mohammedans and Christians, all of whom use the Syriac language among themselves; they also understand Arabic.

As I was anxious to obtain a wider view than that commanded from the roof of the convent, I proposed a walk to the summit of the mountain on the east of the village. My companions readily agreed, and off we went. Passing round the narrow ravine, and crossing the little stream that runs down through it, we commenced the ascent. Never was I so much deceived in any calculation of distance. The crest did not seem more than seven or eight minutes off; and yet it was not till after half an hour's hard climbing, up the naked smooth rock, that we reached it. Our toil was well repaid by the magnificent view we now obtained of the whole country. We could from this point distinctly trace the great features of this part of the Antilebanon range. We had reached the loftiest of those gigantic terraces, which form the eastern slopes of these mountains. This upper terrace is the broadest of them all. From the spot where we stood on its southern or south-eastern brow to the foot of the mountains behind it, we estimated at two hours. This latter range, which bounds it on the north-west, is the main chain of Antilebanon. It runs along on the eastern side of the plain of Zebedány, past Blúdán and Ma'rabún, and finally sinks down between Hasya and Shemstn. This ridge is of great breadth, and has an average height of about 6000 feet. The great plateau, that stretches along at its base, is comparatively level, though here and there intersected by deep valleys and water-courses. The soil, so far as I saw it, is stony, but not barren. There are few springs of water, and it is consequently parched

and burned up by the summer sun. Many parts of it are cultivated, and particularly a lower portion, like a vast basin, behind Yabrūd.

The ridge on which we now stood forms the supporting wall of this upper terrace. The summit of the ridge is but little elevated above the level of the plain itself. This correspondence in altitude, however, does not appear at first sight; as immediately behind the crest, the action of the water forcing its way through the openings into the plain below, has in the course of ages worn out a series of basins; and in traversing these the traveller seems to be now passing through defiles, and now clambering over intervening hills. It is only when a commanding position is gained, and the eye takes in the whole panorama, that the general features are perceived, and the peculiarity of their construction strikes the beholder. The several ridges, which constitute the eastern slopes of these mountains, then appear as the crests of so many broad waves driven before a storm, graceful in form and gentle in curve, as seen to the leeward, but bold, frowning and broken as we meet them.

This second great chain begins at the valley of Helbôn, just above the fountain. Its course is nearly north-east by east, with a slight curve to the north. It passes to the west of the village of Renkûs; and is intersected, as we have seen, by the wild pass at Jubb 'Adîn, by the two others referred to above, and by a fourth at Yabrūd. At this last place it sweeps round to the northward, and joins the central chain. A low branch shoots out from it at Yabrūd, and sinks down between that village and Nebk.

Another ridge takes its rise at the fountain of Helbôn, runs along nearly parallel to the former to Saidanâya, and terminates as above described.

A third *general* ridge begins at Mentn. South-west of this village it may be traced in a broken line towards 'Ain es-Sâheb, at the lower part of Wady Helbôn. It runs north-east, parallel to the others, dividing the plain of Saidanâya from the eastern part of the Sahara, and decreases gradually in altitude till it terminates suddenly about an hour S. W. by W. of the village Kutaifeh in the plain of Jerūd. To the north-west of this point is an open space more than half an hour in breadth; and here the plain of Saidanâya meets that of Jerūd. The former, however, is much higher than the latter, and there is undulating,

broken ground between them. This opening extends to the end of another range of hills, which rises at a point one hour from Kutaifeh N. 75 W. and runs N. E. by E. curving to the north. It forms the boundary between the plains of Yabrūd (a continuation of that of Saidaṅāya) and Jerūd. This chain is different in appearance from the former; it is loftier, with sloping sides and without the crest-like summit.

The fourth general ridge is the range of the Salahtyeh hills. It runs north-east in a curved line to Jebel Tintyeh. It is much lower than any of the others, but has two lofty peaks. One is behind Salahiyyeh and overlooking Damascus, which has an elevation of 1389 feet above the city, or about 3489 feet above the sea. The other, Jebel Tintyeh, is still higher. At the latter peak this range divides into two distinct chains enclosing between them a small plain, which will be referred to hereafter. One of these branches forms the south-eastern boundary of the plain of Jerūd, and the other turning nearly due east bounds the plain of Damascus on the north, and then stretches along the border of the desert to Palmyra.

From this commanding spot I roughly sketched, as is my custom, the leading features of the country, the lines of mountain ranges, and the relative positions of villages. I also took bearings of all the villages in sight, and such other places as I wished to lay down with accuracy on the map. I fear these minute details of mountains, vales and villages will not be easily comprehended without the aid of a map. To the general reader I cannot recommend one. I know of none; and I believe there is none, in which there is any true delineation of this section of country.

The view we now enjoyed was one of great interest, and in some places of grandeur; but as a whole it was desolate and barren. The only green spots that met our view were, a small section of the plain of Damascus, which could be seen over the white intervening hills; and a narrow strip at our feet along the banks of the stream, that forces its way through the chasm at Ma'lūla. We stood on the edge of a fearful precipice; the naked rock in front sinking down perpendicularly many hundred feet.

Having finished our observations, we descended as we came up. We bade farewell to our hospitable host, and rode off at ten o'clock. We followed a road up the side of the basin in a direction nearly due north, and in half an hour reached the plain

above. We spent a few minutes in looking over it, and endeavoring to ascertain the position of two villages; but in this last were unsuccessful. We now turned N. E. and travelling over undulating ground reached, at 10.56, a shallow Wady, in which we saw, a few minutes on our right, the village of Bukha'. This village, with Ma'lûla and 'Ain et-Tineh near it, are remarkable as being the only places where the ancient Syriac language is still spoken. It is used by all sects, Muslims as well as Christians; but all the people likewise know Arabic.

At eleven o'clock, having surmounted a rising ground beyond the little Wady, we had below us, and stretching away far before us, a plain almost perfectly level; not of great breadth near the spot where we stood, but widening as it advanced. This plain is depressed below the surface of the plateau about 200 feet. Along the south-east side runs the bare ridge of naked rock sloping upward to the crest, as described above. From this spot, too, we could see through the gorge the fine village of Yabrūd, surrounded by its gardens and orchards. It bore N. 50 E.

Our road ran over the plain, near the foot of the hills. There was nothing here to interest, or please the eye. The soil is better than in the plateau above, and large tracts are cultivated. We could see here and there in the distance the husbandman with his yoke of oxen, turning up the soil, and preparing it for the seed. A smart ride of an hour and a half, brought us to the small village of Râs el-'Ain, at the entrance of the Yabrūd pass. In the village we saw a few hewn stones and some fragments of large columns; but no other remains of antiquity. Beside it is a fine fountain, shaded by a beautiful weeping willow. The waters are led over the neighboring gardens and vineyards, which they cover with verdure. Turning from this village, we passed on toward the ravine. It is not so narrow or so grand as that of Ma'lûla, but it is more picturesque. The dense foliage of the trees relieves the stern grandeur of the white cliffs, while the luxuriant vineyards, intersected by little canals and rivulets, give a softness to the scene.

We observed as we rode along a few caves in the face of the precipices above us. In one of these, high up, I saw a basket suspended to the roof; and was still more surprised when a female form appeared at the entrance. This was the house of the "Nâtîr," or keeper of the vineyards. Five minutes below Râs el-'Ain we came to another fountain called Neba' Yabrūd. The

water springs up and forms a miniature lake, clear as crystal, at the foot of the northern cliff. A lovely plat of green turf stretches along its bank. This was too sweet a spot to be passed by weary, hungry and thirsty travellers. Our morning's walk and midday's ride had whetted our appetites. So picketing our horses, lunch was spread, and water served from the fountain, cool and refreshing. The friendly *Natir* brought some bunches of fine looking grapes; but we found them still sour and unpalatable. The ground and air are cold here, he said, and the grapes are long in ripening.

We left this lovely spot at 1.25, and rode through the glen to Yabrūd. As we advanced, my attention was arrested by a lofty conical hill, white as snow from base to summit. Rising up regular as a pyramid over the foliage of the intervening gardens, it had a most singular appearance. It is, perhaps, nearly five hundred feet high; and its sides are smooth as if dressed by human hands. It is of chalky rock, and resembles some of those along the Barada, near Damascus, but is much whiter. It is completely isolated, and is more than a quarter of a mile from the main chain.

As we approached the village we saw a number of men engaged in digging the madder roots; an operation of much labor, as they have to excavate to the depth of some five feet. They first saturate the soil with water, and then while it is moist they dig. At 1.48 we entered the village. As we rode through the streets our attention was first attracted by a square building in every respect resembling that at Saidanāya. Being guided to the church, I was astonished to see the beauty and solidity of its walls. They must be ascribed to the age of Roman rule in Syria. The stones, too, were still more ancient; for in many of them is seen the Phœnician bevel. In the walls of private houses, in the mosk, and about the streets and lanes, are also broken columns, and large hewn stones in profusion; bearing testimony to the pristine importance of the place. The situation is such as would in any age naturally draw toward it a considerable population. It is built in a level plain on the eastern side of the Ma'lūla range of mountains, at the place where it turns northward. The water which supplies it, and spreads luxuriant vegetation over the gardens and fields around, flows from two sublime glens in the neighboring hills: One of these is that we came through; the other is further to the north-east. The peo-

ple are robust and healthy in appearance. They have a freshness in their countenance, and an elasticity in their bodies, that are the sure indications of pure air. It would seem, indeed, as if the only disease known were ophthalmia, which is occasioned no doubt by the dazzling whiteness of the surrounding country. There is here a large number of Christians belonging to the Syrian Catholic church. The church is a large building, and the residence of the bishop beside it is extensive and handsome.

Yabrûd is a place of considerable antiquity. It was the seat of a bishop in the early ages of the Christian church. The name *Jabruda* is found in the Acts of the Councils of both Nice and Chalcedon. It is mentioned also by Ptolemy. It sometimes was ranked under Damascus; and at other times under the metropolitan city Edessa.<sup>1</sup>

We left Yabrûd at 2.10, and took the road along the base of the white hill in a direction about S. 19 E. In half an hour we reached the top of a broad swell that here crossed the plain diagonally, striking out eastward from the Ma'lûla range. We descended from this into a fertile vale, and on the rising ground, on the opposite side of it, saw the village of Küstûl. At 3.8 we reached this place. Küstûl is on the great Aleppo road, which runs from this in nearly a straight line to Nebk. It is situated towards the south-eastern side of the plain of Yabrûd, which, as above stated, is a continuation of that of Saidanâya; and is near the foot of the range of mountains that separates this plain from the plain of Jerûd. The country between this and Nebk is perfectly flat; and the latter place is seen in the distance bearing N. 32½ E. Küstûl is mentioned by Abulfeda as a district "which borders on Lebanon and lies between Hums and Damascus." The name suggests the Latin *Castellum*. An ancient castle may have once stood here to protect the caravan road. There are still some remains of antiquity in the large old Khân. The village consists of about thirty houses built round the caravansary, a large structure resembling those found along the leading roads in every part of Syria. There is a "Kastel" put down on the map of Berghaus; but it is there N. by E. of Yabrûd, instead of S. by E. In fact this whole region in Berghaus's map is a mere fancy sketch. A range of mountains is made to run between Yabrûd and the Aleppo road, whereas the whole is a perfect plain.

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<sup>1</sup> Relandi Palestina, p. 217.

We were on horseback again at 3.15, and pursued our journey at a quick pace toward the south-west along the caravan road. The ground is undulating; and the road follows a serpentine course between little swelling hills and by the sides of water-courses, now dry. It is only occasionally the traveller can get a peep at the plain around. This is not a great loss, however, for a more dreary and barren tract could scarce be imagined. There are no trees; there is no verdure; there is nothing to attract the eye but the blasted gravelly soil, and the white mountain-sides beyond, and the unvarying blue sky above. The bold cliffs that crown the ridges westward, form the only features of the landscape; all the rest is bare and monotonous. Nor is there anything to mark your progress as you urge your steed onward, save the half-ruined wells, excavated by a more provident generation, to collect a little water during the winter rains, that the weary traveller might have wherewith to refresh his parched lips during the long summer drought.

Having turned to the left a little, and entered a narrow defile, running nearly parallel to the mountain-range, we reached at six o'clock a ruined Khân. Five minutes before reaching it, we observed on our right the road that comes from Ma'lûla, through 'Ain et-Tneh. We were now at the western end of the fine pass that completely intersects these mountains, and through which the stream from Ma'lûla, in winter, forces its way to the plain of Jerûd. We continued our journey by the dim light of the moon. The rocks and precipices above and around assumed a thousand fantastic shapes as the silvery moonlight fell upon them. I observed that, soon after entering the ravine, the road is hewn out in the rock along the mountain-side on the right, to avoid the bed of a stream which, though now quite dry, must in winter be an angry torrent; as it is the only outlet for the surplus waters of the basin at Ma'lûla, and of the intervening plain. From this it descends into a wider valley, with steep, wooded sides. In forty minutes from the Khân we emerged from the pass into the fine plain of Jerûd. A deserted Khân stands near the foot of the mountain on this side. In thirty-five minutes more we reached Kutaifeh.

It was now late, and we had some difficulty in finding a place for ourselves and horses. We at last succeeded in rousing a family; and having secured, in separate stables, our unruly animals, whose fierce spirits a few hours ride had not tamed, we

spread our beds on the floor of a clean apartment. Dinner soon appeared, and with it our venerable host, who had no doubt scented the good things. *Sugār*, he said, was good for the colic, with which he had been sadly troubled for some time past. This was quite a new remedy to us; but, as our servant had just opened a little case of the coveted article, we indulged the old man's longings.

*October 21st.* Before the first streak of light had appeared on the eastern horizon, we were up and had commenced our frugal morning meal. As we had expressed our intention of going to *Maksūra*, we were now endeavoring to bargain for a guide. Many a fear was expressed as to our safety; and many a doubt as to whether the Arabs would allow us to pass, at least with such comfortable clothing. We were assured a strong guard of villagers would be absolutely necessary. After much talk and no little noise, we succeeded in persuading the son of our host to accompany us. Before starting, however, I wished to take some bearings, and went up to the top of the house; but my object being known I was invited by our new guide to ascend the minaret connected with the mosk. Considerably surprised at such an invitation from a Muslim, I readily and gladly followed him. On our way up, we met the *Mu'ezzin*; he had just been summoning the faithful to morning prayer. I had to wait some time ere the sun's rays revealed the objects I wished to see. I then sketched the features of the great plain, and the mountain ranges in sight; and took several important bearings.

About two hours distant, S. 56 W., rose the lofty summit of *Jebel Tintyeh*. A little to the right of it was the termination of the *Menin* range, which we had crossed in going to *Saidanāya*. To the right of this again I could look over the plain of *Saidanāya* to the lofty summit of *Shurabin*. There commences the ridge of lofty hills that separates the plain of *Jerūd* from that of *Yabrūd*. These hills attain their greatest altitude about an hour and a half from their commencement, and then gradually decrease as they advance. The line of the *Aleppo* road, and entrance of the pass, through which we came last night, bears due north. Away eastward runs the broad plain of *Jerūd*. It is about an hour and a quarter wide at this place, but increases as it advances. It has a level surface, and a fertile soil as far as *'Atny*; but beyond that it is barren and stony. Two long subterranean aqueducts, one near the base of the north-eastern hills, and the other

between Mu'addamiyeh and Jerūd, collect water for irrigation. Nearly five hours distant, N. 60 E., I could distinctly see the beginning of the mountain-chain that there divides the plain, and runs unbroken to the south of Kuryetein, and from thence to Palmyra. In my journey to the latter city, about a year and a half before, I went on the south side of this range to near its termination, and then crossed over to the northern side, about four hours from Palmyra. On my return, I kept on the northern side the whole way, along the vast and dreary plain to Kuryetein, and thence to 'Atny and Jerūd. Jerūd bears from Kutaifeh N. 64 E., distant two and a half hours with camels. Beyond it is an extensive salt marsh, like a little lake. Mu'addamiyeh bears N. 82 E., distant forty minutes with camels. Buhaibeh is at the foot of the hills, N. 89 E., distant about an hour and a quarter.

The Palmyra road leaves that to Aleppo, at Kutaifeh; from this village to Damascus they are united, and cross the Salahiyeh range of hills near the eastern side of Jebel Tintiyeh. The distance is  $5\frac{1}{4}$  hours. The country we had passed through so far, has been visited, though never, so far as I know, accurately or fully described. Dr. Eli Smith appears to have followed nearly the same route pursued by us from Damascus to Yabrūd.<sup>1</sup> The note by Tannūs there given, to the effect that, "The country from Tell and Menin to the environs of Hums, is not susceptible of cultivation," is not altogether accurate. There is no question that a great part of it is now barren; but still, as I have stated above, large tracts of the plains between Tell and Yabrūd might be cultivated with profit; and in many places the soil is good and fertile. At a little distance, the whole region looks like a parched desert, especially when seen toward the close of summer; but when more closely examined, we perceive a light though stony soil, sufficient, when watered by the rains of winter, to yield a crop of wheat. The country is in most places well adapted for the cultivation of the vine and the fig. Here, as at Helbôn, I observed a small white grape, greatly resembling some of those grown on the banks of the Rhine. The wines made in the district are esteemed among the best in Syria.

We left Kutaifeh at 7.20, and crossed the plain in a direction due south. We were here entering on new ground. No traveller had ever traversed the mountains now before us, or visited the

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<sup>1</sup> Biblical Researches, Vol. III. Appendix, p. 171.

village beyond. In twenty-five minutes we reached the foot of the hills, and entered a little Wady up which we wound our way to the summit, turning a little to the right. At 8.3 we were on the top of the ridge. We now observed how this chain divides; one branch turning eastward, and the other, on which we stood, north-east by east. Descending five minutes to a shallow Wady between the ridges, we turned down it N. 62 E., and then gradually swept round the base of a hill toward the east. At 8.30 we had passed this hill and entered another Wady, running nearly parallel to the former. Down this we rode, in the bed of a winter torrent, to the side of a little undulating plain, which seems completely encompassed with mountains. It is almost wholly barren, like the hillsides around. It has no fountains, and affords but scanty fare to the flocks of goats we saw scattered over it. On a rock beside our path I observed a bush of the Caper tree. It has long shoots something similar to the vine, but covered with thorns. This is the only one I saw in Antilebanon. They are, however, common in Lebanon.

At nine o'clock, we reached the foot of a range of lofty hills, running here at nearly right angles to our course. Our road now turned along its base nearly due south, and ran along in the bottom of a valley. Here we struck the direct road from Damascus to Ruhaibeh. At 9.8 we reached a small fountain of brackish water. The valley now becomes wilder and if possible more desolate, having steep and rocky banks of white limestone. We followed it in its winding course till we entered the plain of Damascus at 9.45. From this point the plain seems of vast extent; extending westward to the base of Hermon, south-west to Māni'a, and southward to Jebel Haurān; while on the east it is shut in by the graceful group of the *Tellil* or Jebel Aghār. It appears from this place to be completely encircled by mountains.

Our guide manifested considerable anxiety as we approached the plain. He seized his musket with a firmer grasp, drew his girdle tighter, and otherwise arranged his dress, "girding up his raiment," as if preparing for action. Many a strange and exciting tale did he relate, too, of the encounters of his people with the Arabs, of his own hairbreadth escapes, and of the danger he now ran on this account, should the enemies of his people meet him. As we rode along, therefore, we kept a sharp lookout. We knew ourselves that we were on the borders of civilization,

if not beyond them; and that if we encountered the Bedawins we had a fair chance to be plundered. As we surmounted the last spur of the mountain we looked anxiously over the broad level expanse lying before us; but we sought in vain for the black tent, or the wide-spreading flock, or the roving cavaliers. There was the ploughman with his oxen, and the village shepherd with his few goats, and the peasant with his hoe, all peacefully following their several avocations. Our guide was pleased, and we were disappointed, perhaps agreeably. No matter. Maksúra was now before us, the road straight, and the way clear. We paid off our guide, and he returned in peace; while we set forward at a brisk pace to the village.

Our road was now south-east, over a flat and fertile plain. On our left, as we advanced, the mountains receded, and decreased in altitude. A Wady of some breadth completely intersects the whole range; and on each side of it the mountains rise up again with a gradual slope. At 10.20 we reached Maksúra.

Our attention, as we approached this place, had been for some time drawn to a large and heavy building, rising high above the flat roofs of the village houses; and which, from its position on the summit of a gentle eminence, is a conspicuous object for many miles around. To this we at once directed our horses; and on reaching it were no little astonished at the size, beauty and completeness of the structure. It is a temple of Corinthian architecture, oblong in form, and having a large door at both east and west end. At each end are pilasters supporting a rich entablature and pediment. A deep cornice was carried round the whole exterior of the building, supported by pilasters at the angles and along the sides. The lofty arched doorways admit to small vestibules; and from these doors open to the body of the building. These doorways being all in a line, there was thus a clear passage through the temple from east to west. The interior is nearly square; on each side are three pilasters, and a very rich cornice runs round the whole. The walls are almost perfect, though they have been disfigured by an attempt to convert it into a fortification. With the exception of the temples at Ba'albek and Palmyra, I have seen none in this country in such good preservation; and there are few that could be compared with it for beauty of design, though the architecture is not in the best style.

On the west end, near the north-east corner, about ten feet

from the ground, we found the following inscription; the first part in very large characters, but the remainder much smaller.

ΥΠΕΡC ∞ ΤΗΡΙΑC Τ ∞ ΝΚΥΡΙ ∞ Ν  
 ΗΜ ∞ ΝΑΥΤΟΚΡΑΤΟΡ ∞ ΝΚΑΙC  
 ΑΡ ∞ ΝΜΑΡΚ ∞ ΝΙΟΥΑΙ ∞ Ν  
 :::::::::::CΤ ∞ :::::: ΑΦΙΕΡ ∞  
 ΘΗΚΑΙCΥΝΕΤΕΛΕCΘΗΝΑΟCΑΕΙΧΑ  
 ΛΑCΕΠΙΤ ∞ ΝΠΕΡΙΝ||| ΑΡΚΟΝΑΥΡΗΑΙ  
 ΟΝΑΝΕΟΝΓΑ ∞ ΡΟΥΚΑΙΓΑ||| ΡΟΝΟΑ(?)CΙΜ(?)  
 ΘΟΥΒΟΥ||| ΛΕΥΤΟΥΕΙΡΟΤΑΜΙ ∞ Ν

ΕΚΤ ∞ ΝΤΟΥ  
 ΘΕΟΥΕΤΟΥC  
 ΖΝΦΥΠΕΡΒΕΡΒ  
 ΤΑΙΟΥ·ΓΕ

From the top of the temple, to which I ascended by a staircase at the south-east angle, I had a commanding view of the vast plain. In the distance, south by east, I saw three large-looking buildings, called the *Dîra*, the "convents." I was informed they were large castles, but could not get any minute description of them. The people informed me that they lie between the lakes and the group of hills to the east, called the Tellûl. This, from their position, I deemed correct; and it afterwards proved to be so. At the distance of about an hour south-east I saw a small ruined building, apparently a tower; and perhaps intended as a watch tower, as well as to guard a stream of water that flows past it. A broad Wady divides the mountain ridges opposite to Maksûra, running up due north into the plain of Jerûd at Ruhaibeh; and down this, from a fountain at the latter village, flows a fine stream, which passes through Maksûra and waters the plain beyond. It is called Nahr el-Mukubrit, the Sulphurous River. The water, however, is sweet and good. This is an important stream; and, if the water were properly managed, would irrigate a large extent of the plain. During winter it falls into the Bahret esh-Shurkiyeh.

We were informed, just as we were about to mount our horses, that ruins of an extensive city lay about half an hour eastward on the borders of the desert. It was now past noon, and we had a long journey before us; but still we did not wish to leave such a place unexplored. So, accompanied by the Sheikh and a

number of the villagers, we set off. As we left the gardens, in which are good vineyards, we observed a number of large sarcophagi of white limestone, and likewise many sepulchral caves, hewn out in the conglomerate rock of the plain. In twenty-two minutes we came to a subterranean canal, which brings a fine stream from the base of the lofty mountains on the left, called *Jebel el-Kaus*, or *Jebel Abn el-Kaus*. A few hundred yards on our right, the water flows out over the surface, and part of it runs past the fower above mentioned.

Eight minutes afterward we reached a large reservoir filled with pure delicious water, supplied by a canal similar to the former. A large stream flows from it and is carried in little channels over the fields. Beside this reservoir are many hewn stones. Five minutes beyond this we reached the commencement of extensive ruins extending away to the right. Riding through these we reached in ten minutes further the foundations of a large and strong fortress, or citadel, of a rectangular form, about three hundred yards long by some two hundred and fifty broad. In the centre of each side is a gate with flanking towers; and there were heavy towers at the angles. The whole is now almost completely prostrate; but the immense heaps of hewn stones and fragments of columns, both along the walls and within the inclosure, bear ample testimony to its former importance. On the western side of it are the ruins of the city, covering a space more than a mile and a half in circumference. We were told that another stream descends from the mountains a little further east, and that there is a *Divân*, or theatre, near it. We had no time to visit them.

For these ruins we could get no other name than *Khureibeh*. The reservoir and water the Sheikh called *Durattiyeh*. We could see no inscriptions; but our search was not at all minute, and I doubt not inscriptions exist.

We galloped back to *Maksûra*, feeling sorry we had no time to spend among the ruins. On our way we saw on our left a large and deep canal, now dry. This, we were informed, is the continuation of the canal called *Yeztd*, which is taken from the *Barada* near *Hâmy*, and runs through *Salahtiyeh*. This, however, is not correct. This canal is the continuation of a great subterranean aqueduct, which commences near the village of *Kossair*, about three hours north-east of *Damascus*. That great work was no doubt intended to supply this city with water.

We left Maksūra at 3.10. As we emerged from the village, we met a small party of Arabs, splendidly mounted. They were the chiefs of a neighboring tribe who had come to trade. In the gardens around the village we saw large quantities of hewn stones strewn over the ground. Our road was now like an avenue; and led across a plain with a good soil, perfectly flat, but uncultivated. Our direction was a few points south of west. On our right, at the distance of less than an hour, was the range of naked hills that here bound the plain. At 4.25 we saw an old Khân at the foot of the hills; and below it the last of the little mounds that mark the openings of the subterranean aqueduct. From hence eastward it flows in an open channel. At 6.40 we reached the village of 'Adrah, and forty minutes after, struck the Aleppo road. The daylight was now gone, but the road was good, the moon bright, and nothing to fear. So we spurred our horses toward the city. At 6.48 we passed Khân Kossair; at 7.30 we had Dûma on our right; and at 9.15 we entered Bâb Tûma.

We were thus six hours and five minutes from Maksūra to Damascus; and, considering the pace at which we rode, I would estimate the distance at not less than twenty-six miles. The Bahret esh-Shurkiyeh was some distance on our left as we rode from Maksūra to 'Adrah. At the latter village, the Nahr Taura, a branch of the Barada, turns south-east and flows into that lake.

## SUMMARY OF ITINERARY.

		h. m.	
Oct. 19th.	Damascus		
	Burzeh	1.0	
	Saidanâya	3.32	
	'Akauber	1.40	
	Tawâny	.58	
	Jubb 'Adîn	.50	
	Ma'lûla	.53 — 8.53	
20th.	Bukha'	.50	
	Râs el-'Ain	1.30	
	Yabrūd	.30 — 2.50	
			<i>Return.</i>
	19th. Yabrūd		
	Kûstûl	.58	
	Kutaifeh	4.0 — 4.58	
	21st. Maksūra	3.0	
	'Adra	2.30	
	Damascus	3.35 — 9.05	