

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

ARTICLE VI.

NOTES ON PALESTINE.

By Rev. W. M. Thomson, of Sidon.

[THE following are extracts from a letter written by the Rev. W. M. Thomson of Sidon, dated Nov. 27th, 1854. The letter was written soon after his return from a journey from Hasbeiya to 'Akka, and a visit to a Protestant community at 'Alma. His route was from Hasbeiya by Mais el-Jebel and Bint Jebel to Rumeish, which he reached in the morning of Nov. 9th. We give the rest in his own words.]

FROM Rumeish my route led southwards up Wady Kūtāmōn; and in twenty-five minutes I came to an ancient well of the same name. The water is under a perpendicular ledge of rock, and is reached by steps cut down to it—a very ancient work. On the mountain, fifteen minutes to the north-east and three hundred feet above the 'Ain, is an old castle and ruined village of the same name. I climbed up to it, and found the ruins rather extensive, and obviously very ancient. The remains of the castle are simply old vaults, with a part of the western wall. The prospect from the top is very extensive, varied, and beautiful. The hills are covered with a dense jungle of oak and other trees and bushes; and the region is all alive with flocks and herds, and abounds in wild hogs, partridges, and other game. I took bearings of various conspicuous points, every one of which has a name, and a ruin on or near it. But as I am not making a chart, or even writing a regular journal, I shall not trouble you with these unhistoric names. It is sufficient to say that Kūtāmōn is two or three miles south-east of Rumeish.

After breakfast we rose out of this Wady Kūtāmōn, and immediately descended into Wady Bukei'a, a branch, as I suppose, of Wady el-Kūrān. This, however, needs confirmation; for it may join, further west, Wady Kerkerā, which in turn unites with Wady Benna, and passes into the plain of 'Akka at Bussah. Rising to the top of the southern ridge, I sent the baggage to Tershiha by Sahmāta, and turned myself, more westwardly, through a noble, park-like country, to visit a place which I had often heard of, called simply ed-Deir, or Deir el-Kāsy, to distinguish it from another Deir east of 'Akka.

This Deir is in two parts, and is inhabited by Metâwileh. The eastern part was once walled entirely around the Tell on which it stands; and the remnants of this fortification are quite extensive. But it has been so often patched and repaired, that its original character can scarcely be made out. It is, however, no doubt ancient; and the evidences of antiquity are still more manifest in the western part of the village. From this place Harfish is about four miles east by south. Rumeish is about the same distance to the north. Fesûtah lies west of it, and Tershiha south-west about five miles; while Sahmâta is directly south, across the great Wady el-Kûrn.

Leaving the Deir, I descended into Wady el-Kûrn by one of the wildest paths imaginable. By leading my horse carefully, I got to the bottom, where a branch Wady from the south-east joins the one into which I had descended, — a depth of 935 feet by my aneroid. Following up this lateral Wady for some time, the blind path turned westward, over the mountain, and in one hour and forty minutes from the Deir I reached Tershiha. As the tent had not yet arrived, I went to visit Ma'lia, a village twenty minutes north of Tershiha, built on a lofty Tell. This Tell had once been surrounded by a strong wall, and, on the north-west side, are considerable remains of these ancient works, showing as fine specimens of Jewish or Phœnician bevel as you will find anywhere in the country. It was evidently a place of importance. Between it and Tershiha is a beautiful and fertile plain; and on the edge of it, next Tershiha, is an extensive mass of very ancient ruins. The place is called 'Alia. There is one building, apparently solid, twenty-five feet square, constructed of large well-cut stone. I could make nothing out of it. But in all directions are the remains of temples and houses, revealing the existence of a large and well-built town in ancient days.

Tershiha is a flourishing village, of about 3000 inhabitants, mostly Muslims; and has become celebrated of late as the residence of Sheikh Aly el-Mughâribeh, and the head quarters of the new sect of Muslims which follow his doctrine. He rejects most of the Muhammedan traditions, and pretends to accept only the letter of the Korân; but he mingles with his teaching many absurd superstitions, and claims to be a prophet on a new and independent basis. He numbers 20,000 followers; and it is certainly a remarkable fact that he has been able to make such

innovations in the iron-bound system of Muhammedanism, without losing his life. His influence is said to be on the decline, as his private character has become better known. He is obviously a shrewd rogue, who succeeded in duping the ignorant multitude for his own private advantage. He has become wealthy, and has a large harem, to which he is now more devoted than to his prophetic office.

Nov. 10th. Our path this morning led south, up a high hill, on the top of which is a large Mezâr, called Sheikh el-Mujâhid. The prospect from this spot is very extensive, and truly magnificent. In about an hour we came to Yânûk, a little west of south from Tershîha. This village sits on the brow of the mountain overlooking the great plain of 'Akka. Both parts of it bear marks of great antiquity; and it was evidently a large place. The road from 'Akka to the interior of Belâd Beshârah (Upper Galilee) passes through it.

From Yânûk we descended 785 feet, by a very rocky path, to Juth, or as some pronounce it, Jeth, with a very peculiar enunciation of the *th*, as though the letters were doubled, and were to be followed by something else. It is situated on a sort of saddle formed by two Wadys, which come down from the north-east and east. The one from the north-east is called Maisely, and it passes down on the north of the village; that from the east is named el-Mujnûny, and it forms the *fosse* of the south and west sides; for it turns abruptly round, and joins Wady Maisely. On the north-east and east, there is a small plain, as if the water of el-Mujnûny had formerly spread over the low neck which separates the two, and joined itself with the Maisely. This plain has a very peculiar appearance, lying between the high rocky platform of Juth and the lofty mountains on the north and east. It is now planted with olive-trees. The rock on which Juth stands rises up about 120 feet at its north-eastern end above the Wadys, and stretches south-west about a thousand feet. It may be 300 feet from Wady to Wady. The present village occupies the north-eastern brow of this platform. The houses are very lofty, and with extremely thick walls, apparently in order to use up as much of the ancient stone as possible. The whole place is cumbered with immense masses of this ancient stone. The rock is full of tombs, some of them now used to store grain and straw in. Stairways are cut in the rock, in different places on the north and north-eastern corner; and there is

an immensely deep pit near the north side, where, I suppose, the gate of the castle was placed.

I sent the baggage down the Maisely to Kefr Yâsif, a good hour distant, and went myself to Yerka. Crossing the Wady Mujnûny, the path ascended the ridge south of Juth, the road being scarcely practicable for horses. From this ridge one has a fine view down into the lower gorge of the Mujnûny, and of the precipices which defend the south and west end of Juth. I then descended into a very deep and wild Wady, called here Wady Yerka, obviously from the village above it on the south. It must run much further up into the country than either of the Wadys at Juth; and probably bears some other name higher up. Yerka is a large, well-built village, full of ancient ruins. There was a temple here, and on a broken slab I found the following letters: C. XI. NOAO. TΘ. The people here, as at Juth, Yânûk, and other villages in this region, are all Druzes, and very friendly to us. Sheikh Sa'ûd is one of the best informed Druzes I have met with, and intimately acquainted with all the old localities hereabout. I will not trouble you with the long list of names which he gave me, pointing out at the same time the various localities from the top of his house, which commands a splendid view of all Carmel, and the land of Samaria, with all that is nearer, south, west, and north. Bidding this gentlemanly Sheikh farewell, I rode down to the tent at Kefr Yâsif, a distance of fourteen hours. For a large part of the way the path is paved with an intensely hard and *vitreous* rock. It seems as though it had been once fused, and needed only to be melted over to be transformed into glass. This formation extends far south; and raises the suspicion that the River Belus derives its glassy sand, so celebrated among the ancients, from the disintegration of this rock.

I went on the 11th to 'Akka, and spent the next day, which was the Sabbath, with our good friends the family Jemmal. On the 13th, I started for 'Alma, on the top of the "Ladder of Tyre." Sending the tent to Bussah, I struck across the plain north-east, passing below 'Amka, with Kul'at Jiddîn above on the mountain; and in two hours and a quarter came to Kâbery (?), a village among ancient ruins. Here the aqueduct of 'Akka commences. There are two large fountains, like those at Râs el-'Ain, near Tyre, though not so copious. One of them is raised in a pool as at Tyre, and drives a mill. The other is taken directly into the

aqueduct. This aqueduct is comparatively modern, built, or repaired at least, by 'Abd Allah Pasha, who preceded Ibrahim Pasha. But there was an ancient canal carried higher up the plain, crossing a Wady at a village called Kohany, where are the remains of it, covered with hills of tufa. It passed below Ghabstiyeh, and Sheikh Dâûd, and thence directly across the plain to the city. All these names point out ancient sites, and there are others; indeed, too many of them, to be mentioned in such a hasty abstract as this. From this, and onward, the whole country is covered with them. This Kâbery is at the foot of the mountains, north-east of 'Akka, about nine or ten miles. Leaving it for Bussah, the path led round the irregular base of the mountains, and in a few minutes my attention was attracted by extensive ruins on the brow of the hill. An Arab among the bushes gave me the name Shâzerieh. There are two ruined castles, and many other remains, with old cisterns in abundance, and an aqueduct, which brought water from Wady el-Kûrn.

Crossing the Wady which has but little water in it, and is here called el-Minawat, from a place of that name higher up, I ascended to the column called *Hamsîn*. It stands on a swell of the mountain-base, commanding a noble view over the plain of 'Akka, and of the sea. It rises from a pedestal, eight feet ten inches square, and about the same in height, and is composed of ten tiers, each three feet high, so that, with its base, it has an elevation of about forty feet. The top, whatever it was, is gone, nor could I find any remains of it. This shaft is sixteen feet two inches in circumference. A large part of the north side has wasted away during the long ages of exposure to the winds and rains from that quarter. The south side is nearly perfect. It is to all appearance the most ancient monument I have examined.

Zib, the border town of Asher towards 'Akka, lies on the shore west of Hamsîn. The whole plain from this to Bussah is covered with the ruins of a city, now called 'Amariyeh. It is the great quarry for Bussah and all the surrounding villages, and has been so for ages. Bussah you are aware is an ancient site. And Mesheirifeh, west of it, at the base of the Ladder of Tyre, with its abundance of fountains, stands, in my topography, for Misrephoth-maim, to which Joshua chased the discomfited hosts of Jabin, king of Hazor. From Bussah I turned up Wady Benna eastward for twenty minutes; and then, at a very extensive old ruin called Mâ'sûba, the path left the Wady for the

mountain, up which we climbed for half an hour, to another ruined town called Hamûta; and in twenty-five minutes more we reached 'Alma, on the very top of the Ladder of Tyre, and a little more than one hour east of its termination at the sea. Here there is a recently established Protestant community, and I spent part of three days with them.

'Alma is doubtless ancient, as are all the sites in this region; and I fancied it might stand for Umma, or 'Ammâ, a city of Asher somewhere in this region.

Nov. 14th. I set out to visit the celebrated castle of Kurein, with one of the Protestants for a guide. Our path led south below a ruin called Tell Lahlah. West of it is another, named Libûnia, and still another, Tell Marda; all with ruins on them. In twenty minutes we were descending Wady Hor, having a ruin of that name close above it. We came out into Wady Benna in fifty-five minutes, having descended, by a very rocky path, more than six hundred feet. Turning up the Wady eastward, we passed the ruined village Benna, from which this broad Wady derives its name, and then in fifteen minutes rose out of it to the south-east, where it is joined by Wady Kerkera. This Kerkera runs far up into the country, to the north-east towards Akrit, having large fountains along it, and cliffs on either side, which are absolutely impassible. Leaving a large ruined place called Summâkh on our left, we wandered about over wild woods without any particular road; and at length, having lost our way, we laid hold of a Bedawy Arab, and took him with us as guide. He threaded the tangled jungle like an American Indian, and brought us out suddenly on the brow of Wady el-Kûrn, directly opposite the castle. But how to get to it was a question. Between us and it yawned the frightful gorge of the Kûrn, 700 feet deep, with banks nearly perpendicular, covered with trees, bushes and briars, and only goat paths leading down to the river. However, holding hard by the head of the horses to prevent them sliding over the precipices, we finally got safely down, over places extremely dangerous. The bottom of the channel is only a few yards wide, and is at this place 610 feet lower than 'Alma, which is 900 feet above the sea.

My first effort was to make out the age and object of the large structure at the bottom of the Wady. It is about one hundred feet long, and the top of the tower at the west end may be ninety feet high. The lower vault is extremely ancient; but above it

are lofty arches clustered, pointed, and ornamented like those of the ancient church at Tortosa, supposed to have been built about the fifth century. But was this a church? I can scarcely believe it. The tradition of the people is, that this was built to command the water; and that a covered way led down to it from the castle above. There are places in the lower vault which look like the termination of such a way; and the thing is quite practicable, and by no means improbable. My attention was early called to the remains of an ancient dam across the river, by which the water had been raised fifteen or twenty feet; and a channel apparently led from it into the lower vault. It may have been used as a mill.

Having rested a while, I took my aneroid and began to climb up to the castle. By going round the western base, and ascending a gorge which comes down from the south-east, forming the defence of the castle on that side, I finally got to the top; having found my way up through briars, thorns, bushes, and trees, floundering over vast masses of ruins, for 595 feet perpendicular ascent. But how shall I describe this surprising castle? You remember what the Wady el-Kürn is, "so wild that the eagles are afraid to fly across it." Well, its general direction here is nearly east and west; but at this exact spot it makes a sharp turn for a few rods to the south, and meets a deep gorge which comes down into it from the east. Between the two is the ridge on which the castle is built. Near the top, where it is joined to the general mountain, it is a bare rock, perpendicular on both sides, and not more than twenty feet wide. This is cut through by a deep fosse, and on the lower side is the first part of the castle, overhanging this ditch. When I got into it, I sat down, out of breath, and watched the motions of a beautiful coney (*hyrax Syriacus*), whose wisdom, praised by Solomon, had taught it to select these cliffs for its dwelling place. The ridge being too narrow, the builders erected a heavy wall from below, so as to widen the platform, just as Solomon did on Mount Moriah, to obtain a platform large enough for the temple. And here, as there, this lower work is made of large beveled stones; while the castle erected upon it is of admirably cut stones, smooth as if wrought with a plane. They are three feet thick, and ranging in length up to eight and ten feet; such work as you see in the best made walls of Ba'albek. This part of the castle was not more than thirty feet square, but was very lofty, and is

undermined by large vaults, as under the temple at Jerusalem. The stone is of a kind that will never wear away by the action of the elements. They are almost as fresh as when the architect left them.

Below this first tower is another castle, separated from it by a wall about ten feet thick, so that, if an enemy got into one, he had still to force his way to the next. There is nothing peculiar in this second fort, but a curious pedestal, exquisitely wrought, of a pure white stone. It is octagonal, and about eight feet high, with a cornice above; over this stood eight columns, one for each face of the pedestal. How it was finished off above cannot be known, as the top is thrown down, and the upper parts broken. It was probably for a statue or an idol. There was never any inscription on it. It appeared to have been covered by a stone canopy of those pretty clustered arches seen in the building by the side of the river. There is a third castle in the same relation to this, that this has to the first; and still a fourth, which is lowest and much the largest of all. The hill has here bulged out, so as to require that this lowest castle should be carried round the north side directly over the building at the river, but yet some 300 or 350 feet above it. It is from this, doubtless, that the covered way exists down to the river. But the whole is so densely covered with a forest of oak, terebinth, bay-trees, and countless bushes and briars, that it is nearly impossible to explore it. Dr. and Mrs. De Forest reached the bottom of the Wady from Bussah by some other path than the one I came; but he was unwell and unable to climb the castle hill. Nor am I surprised. It was one of the most fatiguing jobs I ever accomplished. This description must utterly fail to convey to your mind a picture of what this strange castle really is. The old gray towers peering out through as dense a forest as ever you saw, and the whole together suspended in mid heaven as by enchantment, fills the beholder with wonder, and a feeling of awe approaching to terror.

Who built this castle, and when, and for what purpose? Questions asked in a moment, but probably destined to remain forever unanswered. If there ever were a possibility that the highway to the interior ever passed up this Wady, we might conclude that the object was to command the road. But this is a sheer impossibility. Yet on the northern side of the Wady, the present road from Bussah and the northern part of the plain

of 'Akka into Belâd Beshârah still runs. This road must have been of great importance, when Zib was the sea-port of Asher and Naphtali, and when all these hills were covered with cities. And as there was no other way up then, just as there is no other practicable path now, on account of the impassable gorge of the Kerkerâ, I am inclined to place the original construction of the castle far back in the history of the Jewish commonwealth. It was the frontier barrier of Naphtali against inroads from the plain. With a practicable road up the northern cliffs of Wady el-Kûrn, the garrison in the castle could easily control the road which lies along that ridge.

As there was no other path known even to my Bedawy guide than the one by which I came, I returned by it to 'Alma, which I reached about sunset, much gratified with the excursion, but very much fatigued, and with my outer garments torn to rags in my contests with bushes and briars.

This region abounds in wolves, bears, panthers, hyenas, jackals, foxes, hares, conies, jerboas, and many other kinds of animals. The whole of the castle hill was ploughed up by wild hogs, and I constantly expected to come upon them while I was peering about the ruins; but they had left the place, probably frightened by the cries of shepherds, who had brought their flocks down to the river a few minutes before I arrived. Gazelles and partridges, however, were to be seen in abundance.

Nov. 15th. Started for Cana above Tyre. Wishing to examine Kûl'at Shema', which appeared to be on our exact level, and not more than two miles to the north-east of 'Alma, I sent the baggage by the direct road to Râmeh, and started myself for the castle. The path ran directly east for half an hour, when I turned northward round the base of a natural Tell, which rises quite high, and is about two miles in circuit. It is full of old cisterns, tombs, and foundations. The Sheikh of 'Alma called it Kûfkûfa, and said it was also called Kufakif. You may try to pick out of this Kefr Afka, if you please; and then we have the site of another town of Asher. The Sheikh says it was *the city* of all this region. The site is certainly large enough for any purpose. But leaving this, as I did, only to find myself bewildered in a jungle, and my path at an end, we will inquire our way from the Arabs that are shouting to their flocks in this wilderness. They tell me, that right ahead, there is an impracticable Wady, and that I must go back, and take the path to Yarin,

by which I shall get round the head of the gorge. And so I did, and, after an hour and a half rapid riding, got to Yarin. There the Arabs told me I was three hours from the castle! To go and come would take all day; so I gave up the idea, and went over the ruins of Yarin. They entirely cover the noble natural Tell, on which the city stood. It must have been an important place. Below the Tell, on the east side, are the remains of a fine temple. The foundations, fragments of the columns, and blocks of the cornice, show what it once was. But there is not an inhabitant; and who can tell anything of the history of Yarin? or of the scores of other ruins, with their venerable old names, which encumber every hill-top in sight?

This Ladder of Tyre, and the adjacent interior, abound in ruins far beyond any part of Palestine that I have visited. Josephus, in his letter to John of Giscala and his confederates, says: "If you are very desirous that I should come to you, you know there are *two hundred and forty cities and villages in Galilee*. I will come to any one of them you please, excepting Gabara and Giscala." I don't know that there are two hundred and forty ruins in Galilee now; but I should not reckon them at a much lower number. I am amazed at the evidences of its ancient fertility and populousness. The whole region now is alive with Arabs, who till the land, but dwell in tents. There is no inhabited village except 'Alma for many miles around it. Moving among these tent-dwelling tillers of the land, has suggested to me the idea that the proverbial expression, "To your tents, O Israel," may have had its foundation in the fact, that many of the peasantry adhered to the custom of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who tilled land, and yet lived in tents. Our friend, Dahar of Khiyam, tells me, that all the people at Salt, Kerek, and those parts east of the Dead Sea, whom he visited in his medical tours, always spent the summers in tents. Be this as it may, I found nothing but Arabs, until I came near to Râneh.

I had not time to climb to the old temple at Belât, but kept up the valley, and came to Râneh, at the end of three hours from 'Alma. We passed along the Wady on the north of Râneh, and in another hour reached Kûzah. This village is 1700 feet higher than 'Alma, or 2600 feet above the sea, which is about the elevation of your Belât. The whole place is choked up with ancient ruins, among which the columns of a temple will justly attract attention. The road from 'Alma to this place is good, and nearly in a direct line north-east.

Kûzah has Sulhâmy (or Sulhâny) on the west, about three miles; Belât nearly south-west, five miles; 'Aitha es-Sh'âb south, two miles; Ain Ibl east a little north; Dibl north-east, and Hanin between the two; all ancient sites. But I have no time to describe them. My object in coming here was to reëxamine the site of old Hazor,¹ which lies in the Wady south-east of Kûzah. This Wady, or rather plain, is 875 feet lower than Kûzah. With one or two brief notices of another place, I shall bring this letter to a close.

I slept at Cana, and on the morning of the 16th visited a site known by the name of Um el-'Awamiya. It is half an hour north of Cana, and owes its present name to the number of singular columns that are still standing there. These columns are nearly all square, though a few are round. They appear to have been, in most cases, door-posts at the entrance into the courts of the houses. But others, more worthy of attention, were obviously erected for oil-presses. A description of one will answer for the scores of them, which stand all over the hill. Two columns, about two feet square and eight high, stand on a stone base, and have a stone of the same length and size on the top; sometimes there are two on the top to make it more firm. These columns are about two feet apart, and in the inner sides, facing each other, are grooves cut from near the top to the bottom, about four inches deep, and six wide, in which the plank, which pressed on the olives, moved up and down. The ground olives were doubtless laid up in rings, or cheeses of basket work, just as they are now, and much as mashed apples for cider are arranged on the cider-press in America. The plank was placed upon them and pressed down by a long beam acting as a lever, by the aid of the great stones on the top of the columns. I have seen these columns in many other places, as in those south of Cana; but never so large and perfect, nor with all the necessary apparatus attached, as at this place. Close to the press I am describing, are two immense stone basins, in which the olives were ground. I measured one which had recently been uncovered. It was seven feet two inches in diameter, a foot deep, with a rim six inches thick. A huge bowl of polished stone, without a flaw or crack

¹ Mr. Thomson holds this spot, Hazûry, to be the Hazor of the book of Joshua. But that city was in Naphtali, near Kedesh, Josh. 19: 26; and according to Josephus was near the lake of the Huleh, comp. Josh. 11: 5, 7. This spot may well have been an ancient Hazor, though none is mentioned in Asher.

in it. Similar basins are still used, but much smaller. That, however, which deserves peculiar attention, is the immense number of these presses, that are still perfect, after the lapse of many ages, and after the olive-groves for which they were made have all disappeared. These trees we know live for twenty centuries (?), and the fact we are stating may suggest some idea as to the antiquity of this and similar ruins. To furnish a demand for such a multitude of oil presses, the whole of those bare hills, as far as the eye can reach, must have been clothed with noble groves of the olive-tree. How surpassingly beautiful must these swelling hills, and rounded terraces, and deep ravines, and winding valleys, and retreating glens, have appeared in those days! This was when yonder city "Tyrus situated at the entry of the sea," exclaimed in her vanity and pride, "I am of perfect beauty!" Alas! how utterly fallen.

There are several old structures of decidedly Cyclopean architecture at this place, the only good specimens I have seen in Syria. But I cannot now tarry to describe them. In three hours from Cana I reached the Kâsimiyeh, by Wady Jelo; and before the sun went down I entered the gate of old Sidon, after an absence of twenty-one days.

ARTICLE VII.

NOTICES OF NEW PUBLICATIONS.

L. SYNONYMS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.¹

WE feel some self-reproach that a work, coming so directly within our own peculiar field, should have waited thus long for a notice at our hands. Certainly no book on the subject has given us such unmixed satisfaction. We were prepared to expect much, from the author's previous works in the

¹ *Synonyms of the New Testament; being the Substance of a Course of Lectures addressed to the Theological Students, King's College, London.* By Richard Chenevix Trench, B. D., Professor of Divinity, King's College, London; Author of "The Study of Words," "The Lessons in Proverbs," etc., etc. Bedford, 110 and 112 Nassau Street, New York. 1854. 12mo. pp. 250.