

Direct communication between Antioch and Lystra had previously been maintained only for military and political reasons; no commerce could ever have existed between them. After A.D. 74 therefore the road from Antioch to Lystra ceased to be thought of as a highway, and must have disappeared from popular language. Iconium, not Lystra, was the natural commercial centre, and has maintained that rank from the earliest time to the present day. Thus the road from Antioch to Iconium was, after the year 74, the only one present to the popular mind; and it ceased to be possible that a traveller from Antioch to Iconium should be described as going along the road to Lystra for a certain distance and then diverging from it.

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(To be concluded.)

THE HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF THE HOLY LAND.

VI. THE STRONG PLACES OF SAMARIA.

AT the close of my last paper I gave as the fifth feature of Samaria her fortresses, the large number of which was due to the openness of the land and to the fact that, unlike Judæa, Samaria had no central position upon which her defence might be consolidated. The fortresses of Samaria lay all around and across her, but chiefly as was natural upon those passes that draw up to her centre. They occupied the high isolated knolls or mounts which are so frequent a feature of her scenery.

1. Of those strong places the chief was that which was so long the capital and gave its name to the whole kingdom. *The head of Ephraim is Samaria.*¹

¹ Isa. vii. 9.

It was Jeroboam himself who discovered the impossibility of Shechem as a fortress, for even in his reign we discover the court at Tirzah,¹ a strong position at the head of one of the eastern passes. Tirzah was also held by the following dynasty, but when the next usurper, Omri, had time to shape his policy, he turned westward, and chose him a virgin site in the valley that leads down from Shechem to the coast, the present Wady esh-Sha'ir or Barley Vale. Here, in a wide basin that is formed by a bend of the vale and an incoming glen, rises a round, isolated hill over three hundred feet high. It was not already a city, but probably, as it is to-day, covered with soil and arable to the top. Omri fortified it and called it Shomeron, Wartburg, the Watch Tower.² The name was obviously appropriate. Although the mountains almost entirely surround and overlook it on three sides, to the west Samaria commands a great view. The broad vale is visible for eight miles, then a low range of hills, and over them the sea. It is a position out of the way of most of the kingdom, of which the centre of gravity lay upon the eastern slope; but it was wisely chosen by a dynasty, whose strength was alliance with Phœnicia. The coast is but twenty-three miles away. In her palace in Samaria, Jezebel can have felt far from neither her home nor the symbols of her ancestral faith. Within sight was the path of her father's galleys, and there each night her people's god sank to his rest in the same glory betwixt sky and sea, which they were worshipping from Tyre. But the position has more advantage than its western exposure. "Though it would now be commanded from the northern range, it must before the invention of gunpowder have been almost im-

¹ 1 Kings xiv. 17.

² שְׁמֶרֶן, from שָׁמַר, to watch, with the termination ון so frequent in Hebrew place-names. The Aramaic is שְׁמֶרֶן, and it is from this the Greek Σαμάρεια and Latin Samaria were formed.

pregnable.”¹ The sieges of Samaria were therefore always prolonged. In Elisha’s day there was the blockade by the Syrians; when, *behold, they besieged it, until an ass’s head was sold for fourscore shekels, and the fourth part of a kab of dove’s dung for five.*²

In 723–721 B.C.³ the overthrow of Samaria cost the Assyrians three years, and in 120 John Hyrcanus was unable to take it under one.⁴ He demolished the city, but it was rebuilt and strengthened by, among others, Gabinius, the Roman general, who came after Pompey. And then as the site had suited the Phœnician alliance of Ahab, so it fell in with the Roman policy of Herod, and especially with his plan of building a large port at Cæsarea, and holding the roads from Rome to the interior. Augustus gave Samaria to Herod, who fortified and embellished it in honour of his patron, and as upon some other high places in Syria a temple to Cæsar arose where there had been a temple to Baal.⁵ Herod called it Sebaste, the Greek for Augusta, and it is this name which has survived till now with the remains of his splendid colonnades and gateways. There is also the ruin of a Gothic church, in which the Crusaders restored the episcopal see of Sebaste, that was here before the coming of Islam. But since then the town has sunk to a miserable village. For as long as there ruled in the land a power with no interests towards the coast and the sea, Samaria was certain to yield again to the more central Shechem the supremacy which Ahab and Herod, with their western attractions, had stolen from Shechem to give her.

¹ Major Conder.

² 2 Kings vi. 25.

³ *Ib.*, xvii.

⁴ Joseph, XIII. *Antt.* x. 2, 3; I. *Bell. Jud.*, ii. 7. The account of how Hyrcanus demolished Samaria is very interesting: “He destroyed it utterly, and brought streams to drown it, for he made such excavations as might let the waters run under it: nay he devoured the very signs that there had ever been so great a city there.” This can only mean that there was a good part of the city below the hill.

⁵ Compare 1 Kings xvi. 32 with I. *Bell. Jud.*, xxi. 2.

To-day, amid the peace and beauty of the scene—the secluded vale covered with cornfields, through which the winding streams flash and glisten into the hazy distance, and the gentle hill rises without a scarp to the olives waving over its summit—it is possible to appreciate Isaiah's name for Samaria, *the crown of pride of Ephraim, the flower of his glorious beauty which is on the head of the fat valley*.¹ But it is very hard to realise how often such a landscape became the theatre of war and famine and of the worst passions of tyranny and religious strife. On that hill a city was shut up to hunger—till mothers devoured their infants and dung was bought for food—in face of harvests ripening all around. Sinister fate to have been associated with both Ahab and Herod! There by the entrance of the gate Ahab drew his sentence of death from the prophet of Jehovah; and there they washed his blood from his chariot, when they had brought him back to his burial.² There Jezebel slew the prophets of Jehovah and Jehu the priests of Baal.³ There Herod married Mariamne, and when in his jealousy he had slain her for nothing, there she haunted him, till his remorse “would frequently call for her and lament for her in a most indecent manner, and he was so far overcome of his passion that he would command his servants to call for Mariamne, as if she were still alive and could still hear them.”⁴ There, too, he strangled his two sons.⁵ Like most of Herod's magnificent palaces, Sebaste was but a family shambles. It is not without fitness that a tradition, otherwise unjustified, should have localised in this place of blood the execution of John the Baptist. The church was dedicated to him, and his tomb is still pointed out in the rock beneath.

On the other roads from Shechem to the coast, there was,

¹ Isa. xxviii. 1.

² 1 Kings xviii. ; 2 Kings x. 17 ff.

³ *Ib.*, XVI. *Antt.*, xi. 7.

⁴ 1 Kings xx.

⁵ Joseph., XV. *Antt.*, vii. 7.

so far as we know, no second town of importance.¹ But on the extreme S.W. corner of Mount Ephraim there is Gufna, which, though not mentioned in the Old Testament,² must at all times have played an important part in the defence or invasion of Samaria. Gufna is without doubt the Gophna of Josephus. It lies by the junction of two great roads, both leading to Bethel, the one from Shechem, the other coming up from Sharon. Judas Maccabeus fell back on Gophna after his defeat by Antiochus Epiphanes ;³ and it was occupied both by Vespasian in his blockade of Judæa and by Titus in his advance upon Jerusalem. Whether Paul was taken to Cæsarea by this way or by Bethhoron is uncertain.⁴

The southern frontier of Samaria was defended, when it lay so far south, by Bethel, and by the city of Ephraim or Ephron,⁵ if the conjecture be correct that the latter is the present strong village Et-Taiyibeh, on the road up from Jericho. Behind these outposts, the avenues northward are covered by a series of strongholds, chiefly on the tops of high knolls, like Gilgilia, probably the Gilgal of Elijah's last journey,⁶ Singil, a Saint Giles of Crusaders' times, and Kuriyat, probably the ancient Corea which Pompey occupied on his march through Samaria. Somewhere near lay the Hasmonean fortress of Alexandrium—"a stronghold fortified with the utmost magnificence and situated on a high mountain."⁷ Alexandrium played a frequent part in the civil wars of the Jews, in the Roman invasions, and in

¹ Unless Pir'athon, Judges xii. 15, is to be identified with Fer'on due west of Sebaste, Gideon's 'Ophra with Fer'ata near the Joppa-Shechem road, and Baal-Shalisha (2 Kings iv. 42) with Keft Thilth on the Wady Kanah. But these are uncertain—the second very unlikely. More probable are the conjectures which place on this same slope Joshua's Timnath-Heres at Keft Haris, and Gibbethon (1 Kings xv. 27) at Kibiah among the hills N.E. from Lydda.

² Unless it be the 'Ophni of Benjamin (Josh. xvii. 24).

³ I. *Bell. Jud.*, i. 5.

⁴ Cf. Robinson, *Bib. Res.*, iii. 77 ff. ; *Later Researches*, 138.

⁵ 2 Sam. xiii. 23 ; 2 Chron. xiii. 19, Ephraim ; John xi. 54.

⁶ 2 Kings ii. 1.

⁷ I. *Bell. Jud.*, vi. 5.

Herod's life. Pompey came by it; Mark Antony distinguished himself in front of it during the siege by Gabinius.¹ Herod confined Mariamne within it,² and buried his two strangled sons there, "where their uncle by their mother's side and the greatest part of their ancestors had been deposited."³ The site of this Hasmonean fortress and mausoleum has not yet been identified. It was near Corea, not far from Jericho,⁴ and on the top of a high mountain. If Corea be Kuriyat, Alexandrium may be the Mejdæl Beni Fadl above an ancient road leading down by the Wady Fusail to the Jordan; but neither there nor anywhere else has a trace of the name been discovered.

We are now round upon the eastern flank of Samaria. In ancient times the passes penetrating this do not seem to have had fortresses at their mouths in the Jordan valley; it was reserved to Herod to build Phasaelis there at the mouth of the present Wady el Ifgim, and to Archelaus to build Archelais at the mouth of the Wady Far'ah. The ancient kings had held both sides of the river and built their fortresses to the east of it.⁵ But at the upper end of the passes leading down to Jordan stood a number of Old Testament strongholds, like Bezek on the high road from Shechem to Bethshan, Tirzah (if Tirzah be Teiasir, and not, as is more probable, Tulluzah) at the junction of the Bethshan and Abel-Meholah roads, and Thebez at the top of the road down the Bukei'a. Some fortress must surely have covered the top of the Wady Far'ah—Pir'athon, I would suggest, the name of which contains the same radicals as Far'ah, and is probably the same as the Pharathoni that is combined in First Maccabees with Thamnatha,

¹ XIV. *Antt.*, v. 4.

² XV. *Antt.*, vi. 5.

³ XV. *Antt.*, xi. 7.

⁴ XIV. *Antt.*, v. 2; XVI. *Antt.*, x. 4.

⁵ Like Jeroboam's Penuel, and Ahab's Ramoth.

another name of which there are echoes in the district.¹ At the top of Wady el Ifgim stood Taanath-Shiloh.²

The northern avenue of Samaria leading up from Esdraelon to the interior is guarded by a number of strongholds, of which one far in was BETHULIA, that kept the army of Holofernes in check—Bethulia may be the modern Meselieh, or Meithalûn, or perhaps Sanûr—a second was DOTHAN, *a mount* at the south of the plain of Dothan;³ and a third by the very mouth of the avenue was Jezreel. JEZREEL stands well forward upon a cape of Gilboa, with a view that sweeps Esdraelon east and west, and looks up the great gulf which the plain throws south as far as Gennin. To Ahab's dynasty, who built it, it was useful for the same reason that Samaria suited them; it lay convenient to the west. It covered also the highways from the coast to Jordan and from Egypt to Damascus.

As you look from Jezreel eastward, there is visible in the distance down Esdraelon⁴ another fortress, BETHSHAN, the position of which and its peculiar relation to the province of Samaria and to the whole of Western Samaria require some description.

The broad vale of Jezreel comes gently down between Gilboa and the hills of Galilee. Three miles after it has opened round Gilboa to the south, but is still guarded by

¹ For Pirathon, פִּרְעָתוֹן, see Judges xii. 13–15. τῆν θαμναθὰ φαραθωνί (1 Macc. ix. 50) is evidently one place; and the θαμναθὰ, Timnah perhaps, may be still recognised in the name Tammûn, so common now at the head of Wady Far'ah.

² Josh. xvi. 6: Identified by Van de Velde with Ta'ana.

³ 2 Kings vi. 13, the Dothaim of Judith iv. 6; vii. 3, 18; viii. 3; the passage in iv. 6 is worth transcribing. When Holofernes reached Bethshan *Joachim the high priest wrote to them that dwelt in Bethulia, and Betsmestham which is before Esdraelon, toward the plain, which is near Dothaim, charging them to hold the passes of the hill country, for through them was the entrance into Judæa, and it was easy to stop them as they came up, the pass being narrow, in double file at most.*

⁴ In 1 Kings iv. 12 *all Bethshan, which is by Zartanah, is described as beneath Jezreel.*

the northern hills, it suddenly drops over a bank some three hundred feet high into the valley of the Jordan. This bank or lip, which runs north and south for nearly five miles, is cut by several streams falling eastward in narrow ravines, in which the black basalt lies bare and the water breaks noisily over it. Near the edge of the lip and between two of the ravines rises a high commanding mound that was once the citadel of Bethshan, the other quarters of which lay southward, divided by smaller streams. The position, which might be further fortified by damming the abundant water till marshes were formed,¹ is one of great strength and immense prospect. The eye sweeps from four to ten miles of plain all round, and follows the road westward to Jezreel, covers the thickets of Jordan where the fords lie, and ranges the edge of the eastern hills from Gadara to the Jabbok. It is about the furthest-seeing, furthest-seen fortress in the land, and lies in the main passage between Eastern and Western Palestine. You perceive at a glance the meaning of its history. Bethshan ought to have been to Samaria what Jericho was to Judæa—a cover to the fords of Jordan, and a key to the passes westward. But there is this difference. While Jericho lies well up to the Judæan hills, and has no strength apart from them, Bethshan is isolated, and strong and fertile enough to stand alone. And alone it has stood—less often an outpost of Western Palestine than a point of vantage against it. The one event by which this town becomes vivid in the Old Testament—the hanging of the bodies of Saul and Jonathan upon its walls—is but a symbol of the standing menace and insult it proved to Israel, from its proud position across the separating plain. In the earlier history Bethshan sustained an enclave of Canaanites in the midst of Israel's territory; in the later it belonged neither to Samaria nor to Galilee, but was a free city, chief of the league of Decapolis,

¹ As the Byzantine army did against the Mohammedans in 634 A.D.

with an alien and provoking population.¹ Many successful invaders used it as a base of operations against Samaria—for example, Holofernes, Pompey, Vespasian. On the only great occasion on which Bethshan was employed for an opposite purpose, the defence of Western Palestine, it proved through the stupidity of its defenders of no avail. In 634 A.D. the Byzantine army, having been beaten on the banks of the Yarmuk, fell back across Jordan, fortified the bank on which Bethshan stands, and scattered the water into marshes, which the Moslems found impassable. The latter sat down in blockade for some months, hoping that summer would exhaust the streams. But long before this the Byzantines rashly attacked them on their own ground, and suffered a second and decisive defeat. The battle was called the battle of Fahl, after the Arabic name for Pella, which lies on the opposite side of Jordan; but in the history of Islam, the day lives as the Day of Beisan. It settled the fate of Western Palestine.

From its position upon the high-road between Damascus and Egypt, Bethshan must have seen many other famous sights and persons of great name in history. It can scarcely have failed to fall in the way of Thothmes III²; but the earliest note of it in Egyptian literature occurs in the fourteenth century B.C. in the travels of the Mohar, who passed through it in his chariot: “represent to me Baita-sha-al as well as Keriathaal: the fords of the Jordan—how does one cross them?—let me know the passage to enter Mageddo.”³ The name does not occur, I believe, in the lists of Assyrian and Babylonian conquests, but Holofernes rested here, and if both he as well as Pompey and Saladin—all three while

¹ Jos., II. *Bell. Jud.*, xviii. 3. In 164 B.C., however, Judas Maccabeus found the men of Scythopolis friendly to the Jews.

² In the list of places conquered by him in Palestine is a Bathshal; but neither Mr. Tomkins nor Prof. Sayce identify this with Bethshan.—II. *Rec. of Past*, v. 52.

³ I. *Rec. of Past*, ii. 112; cf. ii. *Id.*, v. 52.

advancing from Damascus to invade Western Palestine—occupied Bethshan, then Tiglath Pileser and Sargon, with the same line of march, very probably did so too. Then Cleopatra visited Bethshan when she made her treaty with Alexander Jannæus;¹ and Vespasian caused his legions to winter in its warmth.² Josephus says that in his time Bethshan, then called Scythopolis, had forty thousand inhabitants. The ruins that remain to-day attest a high degree of wealth and culture. Several temples have been traced; and there is a large amphitheatre, of which so much is still preserved, that it requires little effort, as you stand in the arena, to summon up about you the throng and passion of the city in its Greek days. Twelve black basalt rows of benches for the citizens—semicircles of nearly two hundred feet in diameter—rise eastward just so high as to let the actors upon the arena see, over the mass of faces that looked down upon them, the line of the Gilead hills on the other side of Jordan. There are fourteen entrances—for spectators, for actors, for wild beasts—and behind these, beneath the seats, the passages and exits are still well preserved. Half way up the benches are certain recesses, which are said to have contained brass sounding tubes.³ The citadel frowned over all from the north. In Christian times Bethshan was an episcopal see, sent its bishop to Nice and other councils of the Church, became full of monks,⁴ and gave birth to a little Christian literature of its own.⁵ The country around was well cultivated, being full of palm trees, and a lively trade was done with Damascus and the coast. Then the Moslems took Bethshan, and almost ever since, except for a few years of Christian occupation before 1187, when Saladin again reduced it, Beth-

¹ Jos., XIII. *Antt.*, xiii. 2.

² Bethshan lies 320 feet below the level of the sea.

³ Irby and Mangle's *Travels*, pp. 301, 302. Cf. also Robinson's *Later Res.*, 328.

⁴ Sozomen's *History*, 8. 13.

⁵ Basilides and Cyril.

shan has been little more than the squalid village which now gathers to the south of the unoccupied citadel. There are few sites which promise richer spoil beneath their rubbish to the first happy explorer with permission to excavate. But meantime, under shadow of the high mound, where the streams rattle down in the beds they have worn deep for thousands of years, and Jordan lies before you, and Gilead rises over Jordan, it is possible to dream very vivid dreams of a past in which Saul and Judas Maccabeus, Pompey, Cleopatra and Vespasian, the Byzantines and first Moslem invaders, the Crusaders and Saladin have all had a part.

With regard to the names of this town, it is well known that it had two. In the Old Testament it is Beth-sha'an or Bethshan. In the second Book of Maccabees and in the Septuagint it is also called Scythopolis. Both names were extant till the Crusades, since which an Arabic contraction of Bethshan, Beisân, has prevailed. Beth-sha'an in the longer of the two forms in which it is given in Hebrew, means the House of Security, or Tranquility, or even in a bad sense, Self-confidence; any of which would be appropriate to the natural strength and fertility of so self-contained a site, while the last might well have been bestowed by the Hebrews upon a city that so long defied them.¹ This, however, is uncertain; and it is possible that we have here simply the name of some deity, as in Beth-Dagon and Beth-Peor. The origin of the name Scythopolis, or Scytopolis, is even more obscure.² The most obvious derivation of course is that explicitly made in one or two occurrences

¹ בֵּית שֵׁאֵן, Josh. xvii. 11, 16; Judges i. 27; 1 Kings iv. 12; 1 Chron. vii. 29 —from which verse we see that Bethshaan was a district as well as a town. But בֵּית שֵׁן, 1 Sam. xxxi. 10, 12; 2 Sam. xxi. 12.

² Σκυθόπολις, Joseph., XII. *Antt.*, viii. 5; XIII. *ib.*, vi. 1. But Σκυθῶν πόλις, Judges iii. 2; II. Macc. xii. 30. Scytopolis, *Totius orbis descriptio* (of the fourth century) quoted by Mommsen, *Provinces of Roman Empire* (Eng. Trans.), ii. 137, 138.

of the name as *Σκυθῶν πόλις*, or, City of the Scythians, who are said by Herodotus to have invaded Palestine in the reign of Psammetichus.¹ Bethshan lies on the line of such an invasion. It has also been suggested that Scythopolis is Succothopolis²—the name Succoth occurring in the neighbourhood—but Robinson naturally objects to the probability of such a hybrid, the like of which indeed does not elsewhere occur. It may, however, easily have happened that the Greek colonists, hearing some Semitic name in the district, should have wrongly supposed it to be the same as Scythian. This Semitic name may have been Succoth; or it is just possible that it was that word of similar radicals to Succoth, which is used in the Old Testament as a synonym for the second syllable of Beth-sha'an, if Beth-sha'an be really the *House of Security*.³

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A GROUP OF PARABLES.

II.

IN a recent paper in *THE EXPOSITOR* an effort was made to point out the relation in which the three parables of chaps. xvi. and xvii. of the Gospel of St. Luke stand to one another. Instead of there being little or no connexion between them, and especially between the third and the first two, we saw that the interrelationship of the three was of the closest kind, and that they all relate to varying aspects of the same great topic—faithfulness to a steward-

¹ Herod., i. 103, 105. It is absurd to give the statement of G. Syncellus, a historian of the eighth century A.D., in support of this.

² By Reland, with whom Gesenius agrees. *Thesaurus*, sub voce בית שן.

³ סכת, to be still or silent, is related to שׁ, sh'k't, which is synonymous with שן. It is used like שן of land as well as men. See Judges iii. 11 and parallel passages. The two words occur together in Jer. xxx. 10 and xlvi. 27: ושקט ושן.