On Maps of Palestine containing Ancient Sites.


In the ordinary course of things, if one wants to know the position of some not very well-known place, one looks it out in a map, and with the help of an index the place is quickly found, and there is no more question about it. By this simple method, the site of any place, sufficiently important to be upon the map at all, be it in the remotest corner of the world, is readily ascertained. But maps of Palestine are unfortunately unlike the maps of any other country; and the appearance upon one of them of a given place is no guarantee whatever that it ever existed on the site shown. In other words, nearly every map of Palestine contains a greater or less number of purely imaginary sites.

I will demonstrate this by the examples of Luḥith and Jazer, both mentioned in the prophecy of Moab contained in Is 15-16. It must be obvious that any description of the movements of an army or other body of men becomes much more intelligible and real, if the course taken by them can be followed on the map: so the first question which a student of Is 15-16 naturally asks himself is, Where were the places mentioned in it situated? Let us see what help the maps give us on the sites of Luḥith and Jazer.

It must be admitted at the outset that the most recent English maps of Palestine are particularly liberal in the matter of Luḥith, for they offer us two sites for it. In G. A. Smith's large map of Palestine, the 'Ascent of Luḥith' is placed just W. of Nebo, E. of the north end of the Dead Sea. In Armstrong's Names and Places in the C.T. and N.T. and Apocrypha, published by the P.E.F., Luḥith is located in the same place, with a mark indicating that the discovery of the site is a gain due to the explorations of the P.E.F., and without any indication whatever that the identification is insecure. But in the map at the beginning of the invaluable Dictionary of the Bible, edited by Dr. Hastings, while Luḥith (in type indicating that it is a modern name) is placed here, Luṯ (in type indicating that it is an ancient name,—though, of course, the two forms are in reality just the same name differently spelt) is placed 30 miles to the S., a little E. of the Lisān, or tongue of land projecting into the Dead Sea, on the site of the modern 'Sarifa.' The map of Palestine in Murray's Classical Maps gives the southern Luḥith in the same position, but is silent as to the Luḥ in the north. In none of these maps is there any mark of interrogation, or other note, indicating doubt as to the correctness of the sites. As, however, it is too much to believe that the same place had two sites, the intelligent reader of Isaiah's prophecy on Moab, with this embarras de richesses, must pursue his investigations further, so as to discover, if possible, which of his authorities gives the more probable site.

The northern site is adopted presumably from the P.E.F.'s 'Old and New Testament Map of Palestine' in 20 sheets, on the scale of 3/ in. to the mile, containing the names of both modern sites and their supposed ancient equivalents. The 'Ascent of Luḥith' is marked in it, as on G. A. Smith's map, without any indication that it is doubtful. But what are the grounds on which the identification rests? To discover these, we must turn to the Survey of Eastern Palestine, published by the P.E.F., pp. 228, 253. We there learn that the modern name of the place is Ta'at Ḥeisah, the 'Ascent of Heisah' (NullPointerException: the map in D.B., in giving the modern name as Luḥith, is thus incorrect), or, with the art., el-Ḥeisah; and this, we are told, 'may be a corruption of the Heb. Luḥith' (!). In this equation, phonetics and probability are nowhere. The ascent of Luḥith, it is added, 'might very well be that leading up to the plateau near Nebo.' And so it might equally well be an ascent leading up to any other plateau or height in Moab. These, however, are the flimsy reasons upon which alone, so far as appears, in the P.E.F. map mentioned Ta'at Ḥeisah is identified, as a certainty, with the ancient Luḥith! That such reasons should have satisfied the accomplished and judicious author of the Historical Geography of the Holy Land and of Jerusalem, is more than can be credited: we can, rather, only suppose that his attention was not called to the point, and that he accepted without inquiry the identification of the P.E.F.

The southern site for Luḥith, we learn from
Buhl, Geographie, p. 272, was first suggested by De Saulcy. Eusebius, in his Onomasticon (276. 43), makes the important statement that in his day there was a village between Areopolis and Zoar called Laveitha. The site of Areopolis is known; it is the modern Rabba, E. of the Dead Sea, a little S. of the parallel 31° 20' (see G. A. Smith's map; in the P.E.F. map, the map in D.B., and Murray's map, identified wrongly with Ar-Moab). The site of Zoar has been disputed; but, whatever may have been the site of the Biblical Zoar, the Zoat known to Eusebius, like the Zoar known both to Josephus and to the mediæval Arabs, was, beyond question (see Zoar in D.B.), at the S.E. end of the Dead Sea. As now the old Roman road from the E. coast of the Dead Sea to the Moabite plateau passed through the Wady Beni-Ḥammād, N. of Kerak [see G. A. Smith's map, with the note at the end of this article], we shall have to seek the ancient Lubith there, perhaps in the considerable ruins of Sarfa, described by De Saulcy, on the uppermost terrace of the mountain edge. Whether, however, the name of the mountain on which they lie, Jebel en-Ḥouéihin, or Nouéhid, is, as he supposes, connected with Lubith, the ancient name of the city, is very questionable. Everywhere there are clear traces of the old Roman road with its walls on the sides (Buhl, p. 272).

Without in the least relying upon the doubtful identity of the name, the site thus suggested would seem, from the description, to be not unsuitable as a conjectural site for Lubith. De Saulcy describes his route minutely. He comes up from the Dead Sea to Adjerrah (or el-Djerrah); proceeding thence in a N.E. direction, he reaches a spot where there is a well, Bir el-Ḥafayeh, on his right, and, about 3 kils. in front, the Jebel en-Ḥouéihin (or Nouéhid), at the top of which the elevated Moabite plateau begins. Ascending the lower plateau of this mountain, and turning to the S., he soon passes on his right the ruins of Ḥafayeh (called also by the Bedawin el-Djerrah), where he passes the night. Next morning he climbs up the rest of Jebel en-Ḥouéihin, and reaches the Moabite plateau; here, on his left, begin the extensive ruins of Sarafah, through which his route passes for some distance, having parallel to it, on the right, hardly 150 metres off, the Wady ebni-Hamid. After emerging from the ruins of Sarafah, he proceeds in an E. and N.E. direction towards Foukoua and Shiha, the Wady ebni-Hamid diverging towards the S., and soon being as much as 2 kils. on his right. The entire route from Adjerrah to Shiha shows extensive remains of an ancient paved road, with walls on each side; there are also many ruins, besides those mentioned, showing that the region was once well populated.

When, however, we take the detailed and, apparently, carefully constructed map of Alois Musil, accompanying his elaborate work, Arabia Petraea (1907), and endeavour to trace on it the route thus circumstantially described, we find it, strange to say, impossible to do so. Shiha is there (about 12 kils. north of Rabba); there is a Fāku'a (obviously = Foukoua), about 5 kils. W. of Shīha; and 6½ kils. S.W. of Fāku'a there is Ḥafayeh el-Jerra, which must correspond to the 'afflether, also called 'el-Djerrah,' of De Saulcy; but here the correspondence ceases. There is no 'Jebel en-Ḥouéihin' or 'Noéhid' at all. Sarafa, which De Saulcy places very near Ḥafayeh, on the N.E., is in Musil's map a little S. of E. of it, and apparently on a different height altogether; and, most remarkable of all, W. Beni-Ḥammād (which must be De Saulcy's W. ebni-Hamid), instead of being only 150 metres to the S. of Sarafah, is 6 kils. (nearly four miles) to the S., and separated from Sarafa by another considerable wady (Seil al-Mīnak'a) as well! The wady which De Saulcy ascended to Sarafa seems to correspond to one on Musil's map, called on p. 89 Wady Jar'ab, leading up from the Dead Sea to Ḥafayeh el-Jerra; certainly the W. Beni-Ḥammād does not lead up in that direction at all, but, four miles to the S., almost straight up in the direction of Rabba. And if Sarafa is at all in the position in which it is placed by Musil—10 kils. (= 6 miles) N.W. of Rabba,

1 See De Saulcy, Voyage autour de la Mer Morte (1853), ii. 322 f.
2 Nu 21* 22* 26* (if, as is probable, 230 259, the 'City of Moab' is the same as 230 259), Dt 21* show that Ar must have been on or near the upper course of the Arnon, on the E. border of Moab (so Dillmann, Gray, G. A. Smith, E.B. s.v. 'Ak,' etc.). Areopolis (Rabba) was in the centre of Moab.
3 De Saulcy, i. 307–312, 314, 317–323, 325, with the map (Planche IX), which should be carefully compared. The description is very minute, the times when each spot was reached being carefully noted, and the relevant distances and directions regularly stated. The route is described in the text above only in the barest outline.
4 See The Expository Times, xviii. 333; cf. 549.
5 See G. A. Smith, Expositor, July and August 1908.
6 See G. A. Smith, Expositor, July and August 1908.
with more than one intervening wady—it is difficult to understand how it could be at all on the natural route between Rabba and Zoar, at the S.E. end of the Dead Sea.

I do not pretend to be able to explain the discrepancies between De Saulcy and Musil; I shall be satisfied if I have written enough to lead the next commentator on Is 15 to pause before he identifies Sarfa with Lubith. Buhl, writing in 1896 (the date of his Geographie), was justified, on the strength of De Saulcy's statements, in accepting Sarfa as a possible site for Lubith (notice his 'perhaps'); but whether it can still be maintained, in the face of the positions and measurements given by Musil, is the question which now have to be considered. Musil himself (p. 75) remarks that Râs el-Fâs, or el-Râs (ibid. p. 72), 2½ miles S.E. of the S.E. corner of the Dead Sea, might, so far as the situation goes, be Lubith. If the Onomasticon is to be trusted, Lubith will have been on an ascent1 somewhere on the road between Rabba and the Zoar known to Eusebius. With our present knowledge, it must be obvious, nothing more definite can be said. As the name does not appear to have been preserved, we must, even to fix conjecturally its position, more closely ascertain first what would be the natural route between those two places, and then what are the principal ascents on that route.2 The northern site, considered above, must, of course, be unconditionally abandoned.3

In the Study.

Gospel.

In his Etymological Dictionary of the English Language (2nd ed. 1884), Skeat derives the English word 'gospel' from the Anglo-Saxon god, 'God,' and spell, 'a story,' 'history,' 'narrative.' Thus the literal sense, he says, is the 'narrative of God,' that is, the life of Christ. Then, he says, 'It is constantly derived from A.S. god, 'good,' and spell, 'story,' as though god spell were a translation of Gk. εὐαγγέλιον.' But Skeat himself proceeds to show that in the Ormulum (Introd. 157), written when Anglo-Saxon was not yet forgotten, the word is used in the sense of the Gk. εὐαγγέλιον, 'good news.' The words are 'Godspell onn Englissl nemamnedd iss god word and god tithende,' i.e. 'Gospel is named in English good word and good tidings.' Marsh had already pointed this out, and had quoted another example from the Ormulum (Introd. 175) and one from Layamon (iii. 182). The example from Layamon is, And beede ther goddes god-spel, i.e. 'and preach there God's gospel,' a phrase, says Marsh, not likely to be employed if 'gospel' had been understood to mean of itself 'God's story,' or the life of Christ. On the other hand, Marsh points out that in Continental Old Saxon 'gospel' undoubtedly meant the life of Christ, and only the life of Christ (see Student's English Language, 2nd ed. 1863, p. 26).

Murray has settled the question.1 'The word,' he says, doubtless originally was god spel, that is, 'good tidings,' being a rendering of the Lat. bona adnuntiatio, which was current, as an explanation of Lat. evangelium, Gk. εὐαγγέλιον. But when the word passed into the languages of the Teutonic peoples evangelized from England, it was adopted as the translation of evangelium, which at the time meant chiefly one of the first four books of the New Testament, or a portion of the liturgy.

1 In his new edition (1910) Skeat agrees.