

On the Reading עִיר הַמַּיִם, 2 Sam. 12 27

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SOME months ago in making a study of the history of Rabbah Ammon (*Amman*), I was struck with the peculiar text of 2 Sam. 12 26-28. It runs in R.V. as follows: "26 Now Joab fought against Rabbah of the children of Ammon and took the royal city (עִיר הַמַּלְיוֹכָה). 27 And Joab sent messengers to David, and said, I have fought against Rabbah, yea, I have taken the city of waters. 28 Now therefore gather the rest of the people together, and encamp against the city, and take it; lest I take the city, and it be called after my name."

It appears from this that Joab captured a "royal city," and that that city was identical with a "city of waters," but that this royal city was not the chief town at Rabbah, and was more easily taken than the real citadel — all of which seems strange. Why should the king live in any position except the most secure one? If there was a "city of waters" distinct from the Ammonite city, which was situated on the hill to the left of the modern Wady Amman, where was it situated? Down in the valley by the Jabbok? If so, its capture would not be difficult, and Joab would not have had much fighting to do to take it. Further, it does not appear how the capture of a "city" thus situated would have made Joab feel so confident of taking the town itself.

Kirkpatrick, however, so takes it (*Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, ad loc.*). He quotes Tristram's *Land of Israel* to show how the wady bends to the north as it approaches Amman, broadening out into a valley under the hill, and giving it such an abundant supply of water that it

might be appropriately called "the city of waters." The taking of this lower city Kirkpatrick supposes cut off the water supply from the upper city, and rendered its fall certain.

Analogy, however, renders it extremely doubtful whether in ancient Palestine towns were situated in such valleys, and if they were, whether the people ever fortified them so as to try to defend them from an enemy. Hilltops or the ends of ridges were almost invariably chosen as sites for cities.¹

Cheyne (*Expository Times*, ix. pp. 143 ff.) states that Klostermann had proposed to emend the text of vs. 27 to עֵין הַמַּיִם. Cheyne, however, rejects this emendation, and proposes to emend to עֵיר מְלֶכֶם, and to suppose that Joab had taken some outlying shrine of the Ammonite God.

This emendation is open to all the objections which may be urged against the original reading, and is rejected by Budde. Budde himself, following Wellhausen, emends עֵיר הַמְּלוּכָה in vs. 26 to עֵיר הַמַּיִם (*Samuel* in *SBOT*), but keeps the latter. He remarks (*Die Bücher Samuel* in Marti's *Hand-Commentar*, *ad loc.*) that it is easy to understand that the "city of waters" was, since Rabbah lies by water, the fortification which guarded the spring of Rabbah.

H. P. Smith (*Samuel* in the *Inter. Crit. Com.*) treats the matter in the same way, defining the "city of waters" as "apparently a fortification built to protect the fountain which still flows at Amman." Where does this fountain flow at Amman? I noted no such spring when there, and can find mention of none in the books which describe it. Perhaps Professor Smith refers to the Jabbok itself.

Although it seems to me that greater definiteness in interpretation than Budde and Smith have reached is attainable, they are on the right track as to the historical fact, though perhaps another opinion is possible as to the original form of the Hebrew text.

Rabbah in the course of its history underwent two other sieges of which we have record. Polybius (v. 71) relates

¹ Cf. Vincent, *Canaan d'après l'exploration récente*, p. 26.

the story of the siege of Rabbah by Antiochus III in 218 B.C. He says that Antiochus found the city situated on a hill and capable of approach at two points only, that he set attacking parties to make breaches in the walls at these points, which they soon did, but that they were unable to accomplish any results by their unremitting attacks upon the city, until a prisoner revealed to them the underground passage by which the besieged were accustomed to descend to fetch water; breaking into this, they stopped it up with timber and stones and everything of that sort, and when this was done the garrison surrendered for want of water.²

Josephus (*Wars*, i. 195 ff.) relates that Herod the Great was sent before 30 B.C. by Antony at Cleopatra's suggestion to fight against the Arabians (Nabathæans), that he proceeded against Philadelphia, as Rabbah was then called, that he captured a certain fortified post,³ after which the inhabitants of the city were compelled by thirst to come out within a few days and surrender to Herod. Josephus in his narrative speaks vaguely of the topography. Evidently he was not very familiar with the topographical details, but there can be little doubt to one familiar with the narrative of Polybius that Herod but repeated the tactics of Antiochus, and captured the water source from which the besieged could obtain a supply without exposing themselves to attack.

It cannot be without significance that on the three occasions when the city is known to have been captured, it was reduced to submission in exactly the same way. This fact makes it probable that the water supply was in each case the same, and that the topographical features involved remained the same from the time of David to that of Herod.

² The passage runs in Greek: *συνεχῶς δὲ καταπειρίζοντες τῆς πόλεως, οὐ μὴν ἦσαν τῆς ἐπιβολῆς οὐδὲν, διὰ τὸ πλῆθος τῶν εἰς τὴν πόλιν συνδεδραμηκότων ἀνδρῶν, ἕως οὗ τῶν αἰχμαλώτων τινὸς ὑποδείξαντος τὸν ὑπόνομον δι' οὗ κατέβαινον ἐπὶ τὴν ὕδρην οἱ πολιορκούμενοι, τοῦτον ἀναρρήξαντες ἐνέρραξαν ὑλῆ καὶ λίθοις καὶ παντὶ τῷ τοιοῦτῳ γένει. τότε δὲ συνειζάντες οἱ κατὰ τὴν πόλιν διὰ τὴν ἀνυδρίαν παρέδωσαν αὐτούς.*

³ He calls it indifferently a *φρούριον*, which may mean anything from a citadel to a watch-post, and a *χαράκωμα*, a mere palisade.

Can we go a step farther and determine what those features were?

Conder, *Survey of Eastern Palestine*, p. 34, describes a rock-cut cistern which he discovered near the *Kalah*, or old city of Rabbah (see his chart opp. p. 24), as follows:

On the saddle of the hill, outside and immediately north of the *Kalah*, a very fine rock-cut tank was found by the Survey party. The entrance is on the north, a rock-cut door $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet wide, inside which a very steep slope leads down to the floor of the tank. The mouth is about 50 paces (125 feet) north of the middle tower in the wall of the *Kalah*. The tank is 20 to 30 feet high, and rough steps are cut in the descent from the entrance, and on one side is a kind of shoot with a rock-cut parapet wall, as though for letting in the water. The main part of the tank is 20 feet wide and 93 feet long, north and south. There is a recess on the west with an arch-shaped roof, and the roof of the main chamber is rounded like a vault. The corresponding recess on the east side is 18 feet wide, 25 feet to the back, and on this same side there is a third recess of about equal size. . . . There is a curious passage just inside the entrance not far below the rock surface; it runs in at first eastwards, but gradually curves round southwards. It was pursued for 40 feet, when it becomes choked. It is 4 feet wide at the entrance, but gets gradually narrower and smaller as it goes south. It seemed possible that this was a secret passage from the interior of the *Kalah*, and may have led to a postern inside the tower above mentioned. It seems probable that this tank and passage are mentioned by Polybius.

This cistern, discovered by Conder, fulfills all the necessary conditions of a water supply such as Polybius describes, and such as the details of all three sieges presuppose. The underground passage is analogous to that discovered by Warren at Jerusalem,⁴ which led down from the old city to the Virgin's Fountain (Gihon), and to the rock-cut tunnel leading to a spring which Macalister has recently discovered at Gezer.⁵ Subsequent maps of Amman mark this cistern,

⁴ Cf. Warren and Conder's "Jerusalem," p. 369, in the *Survey of Western Palestine*.

⁵ See *Quarterly Statement*, April, 1908, pp. 96-108. A similar tunnel seems to exist at El-Jib (Gibeon), see Schick, *Quarterly Statement*, 1890, p. 23, and Père Vincent, *Quarterly Statement*, July, 1908, p. 225.

but I have found no description of the underground passage in any subsequent writer, not even in Brünnow and Domaszewski's *Provincia Arabia*. Dr. Nies informs me that he examined this passage when at Amman, and is convinced that it led to the inside of the wall. As this problem was not in my mind when at Amman, I regret that I did not also inspect it myself.

That the water supply of the city in case of siege was such a structure as that found by Conder seems to me altogether probable. It was evidently not on the south side of the city, nor did the secret passage lead down to the Jabbok, because a besieging party would be sure to look for such a place on that side, where it would be difficult to conceal it, and because in the valley it would be easy to take. Antiochus never suspected its existence apparently until it was revealed to him by captives. In the time of Herod it was guarded by a small fort, palisade, or tower, as pointed out above. Such a structure, if it existed in the days of David, might possibly be called עִיר הַמִּים, as Budde and Smith suppose, for 2 Kgs. 17 9 = 18 8 : בְּכָל-עָרֵיהֶם מִמִּגְדָּל נֹצְרִים עַד-עִיר מְבֻצָּרָה — “in all their cities, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city” — shows that the word עִיר might be applied to the “tower of watchmen,” and so might apply to the *φρούριον* or *χαράκωμα* of Josephus. We have no assurance that such a fortification existed there then, however. It certainly did not in the time of Antiochus, for he never dreamed of such a water supply until captives revealed it to him.

It is clear, however, that Klostermann's reading עִין is to be rejected, if Conder's cistern was the water supply in question, for the word עִין, while applied to a spring or a well, is never, so far as I know, applied to a rock-cut cistern.

The readings of the versions do not afford much help. The LXX had before them the same text as the Massorettes, for they read *τὴν πόλιν τῶν ὑδάτων* in vs. 27, and *τὴν πόλιν τῆς βασιλείας* in vs. 28. Jerome had the same reading, translating *urbes aquarum* in vs. 27, and *urbem regiam* in

vs. 26. The Syriac and Targum on the other hand read "royal city" (קרית מלכותא and מלכותא) both in vs. 26 and vs. 27.

There is undoubtedly much to be said for the text as read by Wellhausen, Budde, and Smith. It would apply to such a fortification as Herod found there, if we suppose with them that the Massoretic text of vs. 26 had undergone corruption.

If we may suppose that the structure discovered by Conder was the cistern which gave rise to all these readings, however, there is another possibility. That structure had an arched roof. If it had such a roof in the time of David, as it had evidently in the time of Antiochus, it may not then have had even a palisade to defend it. The most common word for such a cistern in the O.T. is בְּרֵכָה, which the Siloam inscription uses of the pool of Siloam, which 2 Sam. 4 12 applies to the pool in Hebron, 2 Sam. 2 13 to one in Gibeon, 1 Kgs. 22 38 to one in Samaria, and Cant. 7 5 to one in Heshbon, while it occurs often elsewhere, as in Neh. 2 14 and Eccl. 2 6. I would suggest that the original reading both in vss. 26 and 27 may have been בְּרֵכַת הַמַּיִם, and that partly through the fading of letters in an early copy, and perhaps through a metathesis which brought the כ nearer the end of the word, this was corrupted in vs. 26 to עִיר הַמַּלּוּכָה. This suggestion has the advantage over עִיר הַמַּיִם of affording an original reading nearly of the length of the present corrupt text. It is difficult to understand how הַמַּיִם alone should be lengthened to הַמַּלּוּכָה. If such was the history of vs. 26, one can easily understand how בְּרֵכַת might be changed to עִיר in the following verse to correspond to the preceding, even if no bad writing contributed to the result. The possibilities between this and the reading עִיר הַמַּיִם in both passages seem to me very evenly balanced, however, and the emendation is put forth as a tentative suggestion. The reading עִיר has all the advantage of Ms. authority, the other being wholly conjectural. If the cistern had a small fortification, as in Herod's time, the reading עִיר would be fitting; if it were roofed, as in the time of Antiochus, our emendation would find somewhat more support.