

vain; for our object is not to establish this or that theory, but by throwing more light upon the Land of the Bible, to illustrate and explain the pages of the Bible itself.

F. W. HOLLAND, *Hon. Sec.*

November 27, 1871.

## LETTERS FROM MR. C. F. TYRWHITT DRAKE.

### I

DAMASCUS, *June 11, 1871.*

I enclose a few of the inscriptions that I copied (in all about 120) in Jebel Druze Hauran. I have had no time to write out more of them. I was only there a few days, so did not collect so many as I hope to do on a second visit. Some of them have, I know, been already copied, but others were so covered with lichen that it was impossible to make anything out till I had cleaned them; others were concealed by plaster in the houses. From Jebel ed Druze, after much opposition from the Druzes at Shukka, who were afraid to accompany us and were ashamed of letting us go alone, we went to Umm Nirán (*Mother of Fires*), a curious cavern, partly natural and partly artificial, in the great volcanic outburst called El Wár. There are no ruins near it, and it is very curious, as water drips from the roof and the whole of the country above is an arid fiery waste of black lava. Thence we went to El Akir and other volcanic tells in the neighbourhood, thence to Bir Kasam, and afterwards to Jebel Dakweh. From these volcanoes, many of which are of considerable size, I was able to lay down the whole series of tells north of the Safa. From Jebel Dakweh we went to Dumeir, and just missed, by a few hours, a foray of one hundred horsemen and two hundred men on camels, who seem to have been dodging us for two days, but who missed us owing to our erratic course. They plundered Harrañ El Awamid, and two neighbouring villages within half an hour's ride of a camp of six hundred Turkish soldiers.

In the Hauran we found the true source of the Leja (Tell Shihan), which seems to have been quite overlooked by previous travellers. Wetzstein's "great lava stream," from Jebel Kuleib (which we ascended) only exists on his map. Jebel Kuleib, *the turning-point*, not as Mr. Porter translates it, the *little heart*.

### II.

DAMASCUS, *June 29, 1871.*

Since I last wrote I have been to Hums and Hamah, and will now lay before you the results of my journey.

Hums (the ancient Emesa) is a town of great importance; the country

around it is very fertile, producing large quantities of grain. The manufactures, which chiefly consist of silk goods, are largely exported to Egypt and Abyssinia, and are justly valued. The silk is produced in the Nuseíri mountains, and is of good quality. The houses are built of mud or stone (the latter is chiefly basalt); and I found a large number of Greek inscriptions built into the walls, but as they were *invariably* broken (the better to serve for building purposes), I only copied a few as examples.

There is a large Christian population, consisting of 5,500 Greek orthodox and 1,500 Jacobites and other denominations. Of the churches belonging to the former, that of the forty martyrs is the most important; the apse is circular, and has a gigantic figure of the Virgin painted in it; the body of the church is modern, but constructed with columns. &c., taken from an older building. Tradition relates that the church was built by Justinian, but there is nothing to prove this in any part of the edifice as it now stands. The wood carving of the screen in front of the altar is handsome—the work of a Damascus artist about thirty years ago. The church in the Deir Mar Elyan (convent of St. Elias) was rebuilt about twenty-five years ago. Behind the altar, at the south-east corner, is the tomb of Mar Elyan, a handsome marble sarcophagus, whose length is 7ft. 6in., breadth, 3ft. 2½in., and height, 2ft. 5in., the cover being 2ft. lin. more. At each corner of the lid, which is ridged, is a square pillar, surmounted by a round ball. There are two crosses at each side and one at each end, as well as one on each side of the lid, which was formerly clamped on in four places. The sarcophagus is in perfect preservation, and is said to have been originally brought from Russia. There are now no monks in the Deir, which is believed by the native Christians to be the earliest ever founded in the country.

The Syriac church was built only nine years ago, and contains nothing of interest.

The great mosque is called the Jami'a en Núrí, and was formerly a Christian church, dedicated to Mary, Mother of Light, whence the modern name En Núrí (Light). In the court of the mosque I observed a number of grey and red granite columns and a few mutilated capitals. To the south side of the mosque itself is a small dark chamber, where the head of John the Baptist is said to be buried. In restoring the mosque a few years ago, some bones were discovered under the pavement. As they exhaled a sweet odour, they were unanimously voted the bones of some saint, and were re-interred in the centre of the pillar to the north-west of the Mihrab. In this prayer-niche some mosaic has been used, relics of the former building.

The Madnet Meshed, or, as it is frequently called, Madnet Sheikh Hammed (Minaret of Sheikh Hammed), is considered by the natives of great antiquity. It is merely a square tower of black basalt, divided externally by cornices into four stories, and ascended internally by a staircase built round, and square centre, and terminating at top in a chamber floored with basalt slabs. The roof has disappeared, as have

many portions of the staircase, which renders the ascent somewhat difficult. I enclose the copy of an inscription on the outside.

There are many ornamented sarcophagi in the town used as water troughs, &c., and are called by the people *Rasd* (pl. *arsad*), and are named from some fancied likeness in the patterns to beasts and birds, as the *Rasd el'Akrab* (scorpions), near the *Bab es Suk*, *el Afá'í* (snakes), and *el Haiyát* (snakes), &c. I found, however, nothing but wreaths and conventional patterns sculptured upon them.

I was continually being taken off to see inscriptions in Hebrew or some unknown character, but they always turned out to be Cufic—generally very badly written—or, as in one case, a very conventional pattern of grapes and vine leaves. Many of the existing fragmentary inscriptions have been brought from neighbouring ruins. This fact, combined with their mutilated state, renders them of little, if any, value.

The *Kala* (fortress) is most conspicuous and interesting. It consists of an oval mound about 100ft. high, and surrounded by a moat some 25ft. in depth, which is still perfect towards the west and south-west. The outer casing of the mound is Saracenic, and consists of a mass of masonry from five to eight feet thick, bound together with mortar, and faced with small squares of basalt. Pillars of basalt and limestone, taken from a former building, are used as ties. In some places, as at the south-east, where this outer casing has been destroyed, two other, and of course more ancient, escarpments appear: these are built of limestone (conglomerate). A considerable portion of the upper part of the mound appears to be formed of made earth, as I noticed beneath the innermost casing layers of ashes and burnt soil, as well as a few fragments of pottery. To the north-east some portions of a well-built wall of white limestone are visible, and these Captain Burton considers to be remains of the well-known Temple of the Sun. There being no other elevated ground in the neighbourhood of *Hums*, this supposition is rendered extremely probable, which is confirmed by local tradition. To the west of the *Kala* are ruins of a handsome Roman brick tower, in good style, ornamented exteriorly with pilasters, cornices, and diaper work, executed in basalt and limestone.

The only ancient tomb I found was to the south-east of the *Kala*. The excavated chamber was filled up with rubbish, but was described to me by a man who had seen it as containing six loculi formed of slabs of stone, arranged three on each side. A flight of steps descend to a stone door, from which a passage, covered with slabs of basalt, led to the chamber. With the exception of the door, the other stones have been displaced, and are being carried away for building purposes. I found a few fragments of glass near his tomb.

From *Hums* to *Hamah* the distance is about twenty-one miles; the road passes *Restán* (*Arethusa*), where the ruins are interesting as showing the dispositions of the streets very clearly. Excavations here would probably be productive. I did not find any inscriptions, and all

antiques or coins are taken to Hums and Hamah, where they are bought up by the Christian silversmiths, who as a class are such consummate liars and cheats, and consider all engraved stones and coins of such unknown value, that it is almost impossible to deal with them.

Hamah, a much larger town than Hums, is situated in a depression not unlike a vine leaf in shape, on the banks of the 'Assy (Orontes). A mound similar to that at Hums, but larger, marks the site of the ancient Kala, and stands on the south bank of the river. All the stones have been taken away for building purposes, but to the east, masses of rubble and sun-dried bricks are still visible.

One of the most striking features of Hamah are the Ná'úrahs, water-wheels from twenty to seventy-five feet in diameter, intricate edifices of timber which, by means of boxes round the edge, throw the water into aqueducts which irrigate the gardens. Each Ná'úrah belongs to a company, who keep it in repair. The creaking of these huge machines, which spill as much water as they lift, is ceaseless, and monotonously discordant. In all there are about twenty of them; the principal one is the Mohammediyeh, to the west of the Kala. El Khudúrah is also large. To the south-east of the Kala are El Jisriyeh on the north-east, and El Mamúriyeh on the south-west bank. The current of the Orontes is strong and very deep. Fish are plentiful.

El Jami'a el Kibír (the great mosque) was originally a Christian church. There is a Greek inscription over one of the windows (seemingly a sister one to that which now forms the altar of St. Michael in the Greek church of the Blessed Virgin) and another long inscription is said to be covered with plaster in the interior of the building. The mosque has two rows of four pillars each; the nave has three domes, and there is another over the Mihrab; the aisles and ends of the nave are vaulted. On the outside a flat projecting cornice is supported by heavy corbels. In the courtyard there is a small dome (similar to that which contains the books in the great mosque at Damascus) supported on eight pillars, with acanthus capitals.

Many of the mosque towers are in good taste; the reddish yellow limestone and black basalt are well contrasted in artistic patterns.

The Greek orthodox Christians here number about 200 men (*i.e.* houses), and there are a few Jacobites. The churches contain little of interest. The colony of Jews was driven out some fifty or sixty years ago, on account of the disappearance of a Turkish girl in their quarter, and have never been allowed to return. I visited their cemetery, and have copied the solitary inscription there which seems to have been over the entrance to an excavated place of burial. This cemetery, Kabúr el Yehúd, lies about one mile north-west of the town on the plateau. The cliffs between it and the town are full of caves, now used as dwellings and storehouses. All that I saw seemed originally made for those purposes, and not for sepulchres.

To the south of the town a deep fosse is cut on the edge of the

plateau, only leaving room for two or three rows of houses. There are traces here of the old wall.

My primary object, of course, in visiting Hamah was to examine the hieroglyphic inscriptions, and hearing that fabulous prices had been asked by the owners, I was exceedingly cautious, and spoke to no one about them, but waited till they were shown to me, which occurred on the second day of my stay there. I then endeavoured to eradicate the idea of great value, and I hope succeeded to a great extent. The next day I took squeezes and photographs. The former are good, but the latter, owing to an accident to my baggage animal, are not successful. I hope, however, to return to Hamah before the autumn, when I shall take plaster casts and other photographs.

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### III.

SALAHYIEH, DAMASCUS, *Sept.* 30, 1870.

I start to-morrow upon a journey into North Syria, which will probably occupy me a month or five weeks' hard riding. I intend, if not effectually stopped by the Bedawin, to push as far as Rusáfa, on the Euphrates; here there is an enormous castle about which the Bedawin tell me marvellous stories, and, as far as I can make out, no European has ever approached it. On returning I shall visit the 'Ulah, to the east and north-east of Hamah, where 365 ruined towns are said to exist; they are full of Greek inscriptions, and resemble in architecture the so called Giant Cities of Bashan, *i.e.*, they are of the Beni Ghassan type.

C. F. TYRWHITT DRAKE.

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NOTE.—By the latest intelligence received, Mr. Drake has returned to Damascus, after passing through the Ulah to Aleppo. The Ulah (uplands) begins on a parallel east of Hamah, the ancient Hamath. It is marked in some of our maps as the Great Syrian Desert, an unfortunate misnomer, as it is a region exceptionally *riant* and fertile. Unfortunately, the Bedawin have been allowed to harry the country, and consequently the 360 towns which once existed there are now all in ruins. The extensive immigration of Circassians which has recently taken place will also tend further to the destruction of these remains. It is, therefore, gratifying to add that Mr. Drake has returned laden, not only with sketches, plans, measurements, but also with Greek inscriptions, of which there are a great number lying about. These would, of course, if left uncopied, soon have perished with the stones on which they are inscribed.