

LETTERS FROM DR. CHAPLIN.

JERUSALEM, Aug. 1st, 1873.

SIX or eight more rafters of the roof of the outer corridor of the Dome of the Rock have been found to have Cufic writing upon them. The words appear to be the same on all, but some are partially obliterated. I send you a copy. The writing appears to be a direction to El Saïdy, by order of El Muktader Billah. Probably this timber was sent down from the north, like that used in the first temple. El Saïdy seems to have been a Mohammedan Helena in a small way. There can hardly be a doubt that this roof was either made or repaired by order of Jafr, and a discovery that I recently made renders it certain that either there was no roof there before, or that it was not on the same level as at present—namely, that there is a very old carved wooden cornice still running round the building in the space between the ceiling and roof of the outer corridor on the inner wall of the latter, just above the ceiling. The accompanying diagram will explain its position. It cannot, of course, be supposed that an elaborate cornice would be constructed to be out of sight.

Another point which I do not remember to have seen noted is that the present cornice below the ceiling rests against the mosaic *and cuts the tops of the letters*, and must therefore be of later date than these.

The reasons which lead me to think it possible that the outer corridor may have formed no part of the original building are these:—

1. The stumpy appearance of the whole building, the base being (at least to my unprofessional eye) too broad for the height.

2. The statement that the Kubbet el. Silsileh was the model for the greater Kubbet, which would be only partially true if the latter were originally built of its present form.

3. Such glimpses as we have occasionally got of the masonry of the outer wall seem to show that it is probably of later date, and

4. The certainty that now exists that the roof to which these inscribed rafters belong is of later date than the wall over the arches which form the outer boundary of the inner corridor, and the absence of evidence (so far as I have been able to discover) of a roof having preceded it.

The Cufic inscription, of which I enclose a copy (No. 2), may throw some light upon this question. It is from a stone on the inner surface of the outer wall, and forms part of the ornamental band which runs round the whole building on a level with the tops of the doors. If the date of this inscription is later than 72 of the Mohammedan era, it would afford a strong presumption that the wall is also later, there being no indication of its having been subsequently put in.

I send you also a bit of Greek inscription from a slab from the coping of the parapet of the outer wall of the Dome of the Rock.

More than twenty mortuary chests have been discovered in rock tombs lately opened on the Mount of Offence. I forward plans of the tombs, and copies of the writing on the chests. The latter are neatly executed,

some being plain, others ornamented, but none so elaborately carved as that figured on page 494 of "The Recovery of Jerusalem." Some have flat, others raised lids.

The absence of Christian emblems, and the presence of Hebrew characters, is interesting. I have sometimes questioned whether some of these chests, about whose history so little is known, may not contain the bones of Jews, transported from other lands by pious friends, but I do not remember to have seen Hebrew characters on them until now. On the other hand, the inscription No. 1 might well enough pass for 1610 A.C.

They all contain bones, which fall to pieces on being touched. Entire skeletons *in situ* were also found in several of the loculi, but not a vestige of clothing or (according to statements made to me) an ornament of any kind.

THOMAS CHAPLIN.

JERUSALEM, Aug. 6th, 1873.

By the Austrian mail of last week I forwarded to you copies of several inscriptions of some interest, and in the hurried note which accompanied them omitted two things.

1. I forgot to mention that perhaps Mr. Palmer and Mr. Drake have already taken a copy of the Cufic inscription from the outer wall of the mosk, and that I sent a copy to Mr. Drake two mails ago asking him about it.

2. It quite escaped my memory (it is only with great effort that I can give any time to these things at this sickly period of the year) that the bronze of the doors of the mosk (Dome of Rock) bear inscriptions with the date 216. This of course precludes the possibility of Jafr having been the first to make a roof over the outer corridor.

The top of the outer wall ought to be examined, but it is not easy to get at it. Possibly next week I may be able to see what can be made of it.

I cannot find that anything is written in the Arabic histories about Jafr having repaired the Dome of the Rock, but others, better acquainted with the subject, and with more time at their disposal than myself, may be more successful in their search.

My Arab friends read the inscription from the beam differently from what I did. According to them the line would run, "To God El Saïdy, mother of El Muktader Billah."

THOMAS CHAPLIN.

NOTE ON THE ABOVE LETTER.

We are indebted to Prof. E. H. Palmer for an accurate translation of the Cufic inscriptions lately found on one of the beams in the roof of the outer corridor of the Dome of the Rock. The inscription was copied by Dr. Chaplin, and also by Mr. Schick, and runs as follows:—

"In the name of God. Grace from God to the servant of God, Jäfer

el Muktader Billah, Commander of the Faithful—may God spare him to us. According to the order of Essaiyideh (may God aid her), and it was performed by the hands of Lebid, a Freedman of Essaiyideh, and that was in one and”

Unfortunately the inscription becomes illegible at the date; but Prof. Palmer states that he has found in an Arabic historian an account of the restoration and repairing of all the Mosques and Masjids in the Empire, by Ali Ibn Isa, vizier to El Muktader, in the year of the Hejira 301 (A.D. 913), to which this inscription probably refers.

We hear from Dr. Chaplin also that the aqueduct from Solomon's Pools is now restored, that the fountains in the court-house, Makhama, the Kas in the Haram, the Birket el Naranj, and the Bab el Nazir, are all running over with fresh water.

The repairs in the Haram are proceeding steadily, the Sultan having sent £30,000 for expenses, under the direction of an Armenian builder from Constantinople. In the outer wall of the Dome of the Rock has been found a portion of a Latin inscription, on marble, but in a fragmentary state.

Lieut. Steever, of the American Expedition, has informed Dr. Chaplin that he could get no pottery in Moab like that in the Shapira collection.

THE SAMARITAN STONE AT GAZA.*

My curiosity was first stimulated in searching after inscriptions by observing the extraordinary amount of energy exhibited by M. Ganneau, who visited Gaza about three years ago. I accompanied this gentleman to several interesting parts of the town, and assisted him in procuring a few Greek inscriptions. We also visited the same spot where the stone was discovered, which is distant from the town about a mile, and half a mile from the sea-shore. It has now been in my possession about a year, and was found in one of the numerous sandpits where excavating is carried on by the natives to obtain stone for building purposes.

About a year ago, passing by the same spot, I questioned some of the labourers then at work about stones bearing inscriptions, &c., and was informed that a few days before three of this description had been found. After making further inquiries I succeeded in finding out to whom they had been sold, but having to act very cautiously, in order not to excite suspicion, I regret that I was obliged to delay the matter too long; and upon opening the question about the stones the owner coolly told me that he had *scraped* the two largest! and the other, I suppose, not being large enough for the purpose required, was thrown aside, to share the same fate at some future time. However, after some difficulty I succeeded in getting it; this is the whole history of the stone.

* See *Quarterly Statement*, July, 1873, p. 118.