

ON THE IDENTIFICATION OF ÆNON.

BY LIEUT. CONDER.

THE true position of the springs of Ænon, where John the Baptist is recorded to have assembled crowds for baptism, has hitherto been a matter open to dispute; but it is probable that the light thrown on the subject by the present Survey will be sufficient to set the question at rest.

Three sites have been proposed for Ænon, and the great distance between them shows how meagre the literary indications of its position are. The first of these is the traditional site of St. Jerome, some eight miles south of Scythopolis or Beisan, and not far from Succoth. The existence of a Tell Salim has been pointed to in favour of this view, but the name, as most carefully collected by us from several individuals, is Tell Sárem and not Salim; thus the only confirmation of the tradition proves founded on a mistake.

The second site which has found favour with many authors, including Mr. Hepworth Dixon and Dr. Barclay (City of the Great King), is at the springs in Wady Far'ah, one of the heads of the great Wady Kelt (the traditional brook Cherith), where there is generally a good supply of water. The same name Salim has been sought in the neighbourhood, and supposed either to refer to Jerusalem, or to a Wady Salim, the proper name of which, however, turns out to be Suleim.

Dr. Robinson, however, was the first to point out the most probable site, and has been followed by Dean Stanley, although the full confirmation of this view has not, I believe, been as yet put forward.

John the Baptist is said to have been baptizing "*in* Ænon, near to Salim, because there was much water there." There is nothing to point to the place having been on the banks of, or even near to Jordan, where this particular expression would have little or no meaning; it would rather seem to refer to a part of Palestine which was otherwise not well supplied with water. The expression, "He that was with thee beyond Jordan," would also seem to indicate that the place of baptism in question was not east of the river. Ænon might very well be thought to be a district name from the preposition used in the Greek.

Now, due east of Nablus is found the village of Salim, a Salem mentioned more than once in the Old Testament, and even thought by some to be the city of Melchisedec, and north of this, as Dr. Robinson pointed out, are copious springs in a broad open valley. Curiously enough this also, like the Jerusalem site, bears the name of Far'ah, though spelt rather differently in the Arabic. The most satisfactory confirmation of the theory is found in the preservation of the name Ænon in the modern village of 'Aynún, which is marked on Vandervelde's map at a distance north of the springs (three or four miles) about equal to that of Salim on the south. Thus the requisites of two names and an

abundant supply of water are satisfied, although the existence of 'Aynún appears hitherto to have escaped notice.

The character of the ground is a point of great importance in considering the relative probability of the sites near Jerusalem and near Nablus. The former, Wady Far'ah is a precipitous ravine in the midst of a stony country, and apart from any main line of communication. It would be practically impossible to collect a large crowd in such a spot.

The Nablus site, on the other hand, seems naturally to suggest itself for such a purpose: an open valley, a plentiful supply of water, and a situation on one of the main lines through the country from Jerusalem to Nazareth. It has been suggested that our Lord's journey through Samaria was with the object of visiting the Baptist, and were such the case, he "needs must" pass by Shechem in order to arrive at the springs of Wady Far'ah.

This important valley, which forms a great geological feature in the country, rises near Salim, and separates Mount Ebal from the chain of Nebi Belán. It becomes a deep and narrow ravine, with steep hill sides burrowed with caverns, and runs north under the name of Wady Beidán until it forms a junction with another branch near the small ruin called Burj Far'ah. Here the first springs are found, and a stream, which even late in the summer is copious, runs between bushes of oleander eastward towards the Jordan. The whole course of the valley presents here a succession of springs, and the flat slopes on either side allow the approach of an unlimited crowd to the banks of the stream. After passing through two narrow rocky gorges, the valley enlarges into a broad plain, on the south side of which rises the block of the Kurn Súrtabeh. From this point the course of the bed is remarkable, and has never been correctly shown on any map. For nearly seven miles the Wady Far'ah runs parallel with the Jordan, and its final junction is below the latitude of 'Ain Fasáil.

The position of Ænon, or rather of the springs frequented by the Baptist, may therefore be with some degree of certainty referred to the upper source of the Wady Far'ah stream lying, as has been shown, between Salim and 'Aynún. It is one of the most picturesque spots in the country, and the mind easily pictures the wild figure of the Fore-runner, clad in garments precisely similar to the modern Bedouin, and assembling round him the turbaned denizens of the great cities and the half-clad villagers in the wild glen, remote from the more civilised life of the hill towns and hamlets.

ANTIPATRIS.

In 1866, when making an excursion to Cæsarea and Athlit with Captain Anderson, R.E., and Dr. Sandreczky, I stayed for two days at the large fountain of Ras el Ain, and came to the conclusion that