

SYCHAR AND SYCHEM.

IN the new illustrated edition of Dr. Farrar's "Life of Christ," part 6, p. 164, a view of Nablus is given with the title Sychar beneath it. There are, however, good arguments, it would seem to me, in favour of the view that the Sychar of the fourth gospel (iv. 5) is a place distinct from the ancient Shechem.

The reason for supposing identity between the two sites appears to be Robinson's assumption that Sychar ("drunkard") was a Jewish corruption of Sychem, in contempt of the Samaritans.

By Jerome the two are considered as distinct places. Thus in the Onomasticon (s.v. Sichar) Jerome and Eusebius agree in placing this town "before" (*i.e.*, east of) Shechem, and the Bordeaux pilgrim (Itin. Hierosol) places Sechar one mile from Sechim by Jacob's Well.

In his time the ancient site of Shechem was supposed not to be actually at Neapolis (Nablus), but at ruins farther east nearer to Joseph's tomb, which accounts for the distance given by the Bordeaux pilgrim.

In Crusading times, however, the distinction between Shechem and Sychar was not observed, thus Jaques de Vitry identifies Neapolis with Sychar (*Gesta Dei*, p. 1078).

It is important in this connection to mention another name connected with this spot. In the Onomasticon we have the name Balanus, "id est quercus Sicimorum" (*Judges ix. 6*), as close to Joseph's tomb. Of this title we have a trace in the modern *Balâta*, which may probably be connected with *Ballût*, "an oak" in Arabic. This place is mentioned in the Samaritan book of Joshua, and is perhaps the Elonah Tabah or *Shejr el Kheir* (*i.e.*, "Holy Oak") of the Samaritan Chronicle. (See the paper on Samaritan Topography.)*

It would appear that Sychar was in Jerome's time separated from Shechem, having near it another village, *Balata*, supposed to represent the "oak of the pillar that was in Shechem" (*a.v.*, *plain*).

The reason why Robinson failed to identify Sychar with the village of *'Askar*, just above Jacob's Well on the side of Ebal, seems to be that he did not know the name, which does not appear in his lists or in his account of Nablus. The identification has been supported by Canon Williams and Dr. Thomson, and the main difficulty appears to lie in the existence of the guttural *'Ain* in the name.

A comparison with the Samaritan Chronicle is of interest as removing the philological difficulty (see *Quarterly Statement*, October, 1876, p. 197), for in the list of places inhabited by the high priests after Tobiah we

* In spite of the fact that the Greek reads *βαλανος*, and the Latin Balanus in the Onomasticon, it is probable that the word intended is the Aramaic *ܒܠܝܬ*, an oak, equivalent to the Hebrew *אֵילָן*. The radicals in the Aramaic word are the same as in the Arabic *Balâta*, though the word in Arabic means "pavement."

The same place is probably intended by the "Terebinthus in Sicimis," where Jacob hid the idols (*Gen. xxxv. 4*), "juxta Neapolium" (*Onomasticon*).

find both Shechem and Iskar (יִסְכָּר). If this latter be the Sychar of the gospel it is possible that it has no connection with the Hebrew word for "drunkard," but comes from a Hebrew and Aramaic root meaning "to be shut up." Sikra (סִיכְרָא) is noticed in the Talmud as the name of a place (Baba Metzia 42a, 83a), and En Sukar (עֵין סִיכָר), is also noticed in the Mishna, Menachoth vi. 2. The Samaritan Chronicle dates back to 1150 A.D.; the Arabic translation gives 'Askar as a rendering of the Samaritan Iskar, and as by comparison of other towns we find the Arabic evidently to intend the same place with the original, we see that the Samaritans themselves identify the modern 'Askar with an ancient Ischar or Sichar. The Arabic word means "a collection" (hence an army).

In writing on this subject (see Smith's Bible Dictionary, art. Sychar) Mr. Grove has remarked how much more naturally the narrative in the gospel would apply to a comparatively obscure site than to the very capital of Samaria itself.

"Then cometh he to a city of Samaria (*eis πόλιν τῆς Σαμαρείας*), which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph.

"Now, Jacob's well was there. . . ." (John iv. 5, 6.)

This description is most accurately applicable to 'Askar. The well of Jacob is situate at the point where the narrow vale of Shechem begins to broaden into the great plain of the Muknah (or Camp). It is about 2,000 yards east of the town of Nablus, which lies hidden from it. Immediately west lies the little village of *Balāta* with its fine spring and gardens. Little more than a third of a mile north-east is the tomb of Joseph, and from this a path gradually ascending leads to the village of 'Askar, which is visible from Jacob's Well. It is merely a modern mud village with no great indications of antiquity, but there are remains of ancient tombs near the road beneath it.

As regards the position of Shechem, it may be noticed that the ancient cemetery occupies the side of Mount Ebal above the modern one, and extends thence westward, being separated by about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles from the site of 'Askar.

In confusing Shechem and Sychar Robinson has, as in other cases, followed that very monkish tradition of the middle ages which he so strongly condemns in other instances.

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THE better acquainted I become with the country east of the Jordan, the more I am amazed at its fertility and natural resources. The scenery everywhere among the Gilead hills is picturesque and beautiful. The forests and cultivated fields, the green valleys and grassy slopes, remind one of the park scenery in England. The hills in many parts