SYCHAR AND SYCHEM.

In the new illustrated edition of Dr. Farrar's "Life of Christ," part 6, p. 161, 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. Sicchar) 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 Jacques 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 Balata, which may probably be connected with Ballat, "an oak" in Arabic. This place is mentioned in the Samaritan book of Joshua, and is perhaps the Elonah Tabah or Shejir 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 βαλανός, and the Latin Balanus in the Onomasticon, it is probable that the word intended is the Aramaic שולך, an oak, equivalent to the Hebrew פלך. The radicals in the Aramaic word are the same as in the Arabic Balata, 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 Neapolim" (Onomasticon).
find both Shechem and Iskar (סִיכָר). 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 (סִיקָר) is noticed in the Talmud as the name of a
place (Baba Metzia 42a, 83a), and En Sukar (エン סוקָר), 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 'Aslcar 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 (ἐν 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 Mukhnah (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 Balâţa 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 1½ 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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