

BETHANY BEYOND JORDAN.

"It is generally admitted by Biblical critics," writes the author of the article entitled, *The Authorship of the Fourth Gospel* (*Edinburgh Review*, January, 1877), "that the true reading of chap. i. 28 (St. John's Gospel) is Bethany, not Bethabara."

The Sinaitic Codex with the Vatican and Alexandrine reads Bethania (*Βηθανια*), and Origen states that in his time (186-253 A.D.) most of the ancient manuscripts had this reading (in *Evan Johannis*, tom. viii.). He, however, adopted the reading Bethabara. "For Jordan is far off from Bethany," and Chrysostom (347-407 A.D.), though mentioning the reading Bethania, prefers the now accepted Bethabara. Jerome follows in the same steps, and speaks of Bethabara only.

The objection made by Origen is the same which has lately been urged by the author of "Supernatural Religion," who points out the probability that Bethania is the true reading, and that while this cannot refer to the town of Lazarus, it "is scarcely possible that there could have been a second village of the name" (vol. ii., p. 420). He further states that the place in question "is utterly unknown now."

That Bethania, if the true reading, has no connection with the village near Jerusalem, is clearly evident from the Fourth Gospel, as the position of that place is defined (chap. xi., verse 18).

"Now Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off."

The place in question "beyond Jordan" is therefore not in any way connected with this village, for "beyond Jordan" is applied in the Old and New Testament, and in the Talmud, to the third division of the Holy Land, called in the Mishna (*Shevith ix. 2*) Perea, the limits of which are fixed with great exactitude by the Rabbinical commentators.*

To show that Bethany beyond Jordan is a well known title, and that this reading is quite reconcilable with the other reading Bethabara, seems to me a point of considerable interest, as materially strengthening the argument of the topographical correctness of the Fourth Gospel, the geography of which has been lately subjected to severe criticism, though not by authors very well acquainted with the subject.

The Edinburgh reviewer points to the identification of Bethany beyond Jordan with a certain *Tell Anihji*, as proposed by Dr. Caspari (see *Ed. Rev.*, p. 14, note); but this will not be admitted by any Arabic student as representing the word Bethania, because the H and the J are radicals, which have no equivalents in the Greek word, and because the name applies to a Tell east of Jordan, about twenty-one miles from *Kâna*; it has a descriptive meaning in Arabic which may be rendered "the prominent (or conspicuous) hillock."

It is, however, quite a gratuitous assumption that Bethania is here

* The Greek title Perea has the meaning "beyond." The limits of Perea, or the country "beyond Jordan" (*πέραν του ιορδανου*), are given by Josephus, and agree with those described in the Talmud. The title is equivalent to the Hebrew *Aber ha Yarden*, "over Jordan," used in the Bible.

meant to be the name of a village or town, and the suggestion I would make is that the writer refers to the well-known district of Batanea, which has left traces of its name to the present day in the district called *Ard el Bethânieh* "beyond Jordan."

The name Batanea occurs in the Targums and the Samaritan versions of the Old Testament, in the writings of Josephus, Ptolemy, and Eusebius, and the following are the indications of the position of the district:—

1st. In the Targum of Jonathan (Psa. lxxviii. 23), Bothenin (בוֹתֵנִין) stands instead of the Hebrew Bashan, and the same change occurs in Deut. xxxiii. 22. In the preceding chapter (xxxii. 14) the Targum of Jerusalem reads Bathenia (בַּתְּנִיָּא) for Bashan. The two words are, in fact, the same, *Sin* and *Teth* being convertible in Hebrew, as they are constantly interchanged in the language of the native peasantry, who pronounce the *Thé* of the Arabic alphabet like *Sin*. The Targums therefore identify Batania with Bashan.

2nd. The Samaritan Pentateuch reads Batanin (בַּתְּנִיָּן) in every instance where Bashan occurs in the Hebrew.

3rd. Eusebius (Onom. s.v. *Basán*) gives its name as existing in his day under the form *Batanaia* (*Baravaia*), in which statement he is followed by Jerome.

It is, therefore, important in the next place to state the limits of Bashan, and these are approximately given in the Old Testament (Deut. iii. 10-14; Josh. xii. 5). It belonged to the half tribe of Manasseh, and was situate north of Gilead, and extended as far as Hermon. On the east it included Salchah (*Sulchad*), on the west it reached to the *Arabah* or Jordan Valley (see Bib. Dict.); the name signifies "soft and level soil" (Ar. *Bathana*), and applied to the rich cornland of this district, where the crops are finer than in any other part of the Holy Land.

4th. The notices of Batanea in Josephus are few. The districts of Trachonitis (*el Lejah*), of Gaulonitis (*Jaulan*), and Auranitis (*Hauran*), were within the limits of the ancient Bashan, and Batanea appears to have been specially applied to a district south of Trachonitis and west of Auranitis (see Rel. Pal., p. 108). The name *Ard el Bethânia* now applies rather farther east to the district of the *Lejah*, north of *Jebel Hauran* (the hill of Bashan); but the position given by Josephus would appear to include the south-western portion of the kingdom of Og.

5th. Ptolemy (140 A.D.) speaks of the region of Batanea as including Trachonitis, and gives it apparently a greater latitude of meaning, and the same extension of the meaning, as referring to all Bashan, is deducible from Josephus (*Ant.* iv. 7, 4), where Golan is placed in Batanea, which thus reached to the Jordan valley (see Rel. Pal., p. 318).

6th. In the Onomasticon Batanea is made identical with Bashan, as above noticed, and the following places are noticed as within its limits:—

1. *Ashtaroth* *es Sunamein*.
2. *Golan* in the *Jaulán*.
3. *Gergasa* on the east of the Sea of Galilee,

besides others of doubtful position. In addition to these, a place of some importance to the present question must be noticed, which is also placed by the Onomasticon in Batanea—namely, Namara.

Under the head of *Nemra* Eusebius mentions a town as existing in his day called *Nabara*, or according to another edition, *Abara*. The former is more probably the correct reading, as the Latin has *Namara*, but it is worthy of notice that the place is identified by Eusebius with Nimrah, near Heshbon (Numb. xxxii. 3), and that Epiphanius (*Contra Hæres* 51, 5th cent.) reads Bethamara for Bethabara (*Rel. Pal.* p. 627). This town of Nabara was in Batanea according to Eusebius, and would seem to be possibly the same which is mentioned as identical with Bethnimrah (*Josh.* xiii. 27), a town of Gad, and as being near to Livias, which was situate in the neighbourhood of Mount Nebo. Eusebius evidently refers to the true site of Bethnimrah, opposite Jericho, in one case, but in the other probably to a ruin still existing near *Kanawât*, within the limits of the modern *Ard el Bethaniah*, and called *Nimreh*. This place is noticed in the Jerusalem Talmud as on the eastern boundary of the "land."

The curious connection which thus apparently exists between Batanea, Abara, and Nimrah, has led modern scholars to place the site of Bethabara at *Nimrîn*, in the Jordan valley, opposite Jericho (see Smith's Bible Dict. and Murray's new Map), yet this connection is only apparent, as the reading Abara is easily shown to be a corruption, and because the Jordan valley site is not in Batanea as Namara was.

The general drift of the above notes tends to show that Bathania was the well-known late appellation of the kingdom of Og, which still existed in the fourth century, and of which traces still remain. The exact limitation of Batanea is not deducible, but Reland, one of the greatest authorities on the subject, considers the district to extend to Jordan, and thus a town near the river could have stood within this territory, if it were not further south than that part of the valley which is opposite to Lower Galilee. It is impossible, however, to include the traditional site of Bethabara, or that at *Nimrîn*, within the limits of Batanea.

An objection to the identification of Bethany beyond Jordan with Batanea may perhaps be founded on the long form *Βηθανια*, but as has been shown above, the longer form *Bothenin* occurs in the Targums, and in addition to this, the use of the letter H in the Greek of Old and New Testament is irregular. Thus in the LXX we have *Βηθαβει* for Bathsheba, and *βαθρεφα* for Bethrapha. In the New Testament Bethphage is spelt with the long H and also with the short E, and in the Onomasticon Bethshemesh and other words are given in the same way with both.

An old objection to the topographical exactitude of the fourth gospel was founded on the assumption that Bethabara was near Jericho, and that it would thus be impossible for our Lord to reach Cana of Galilee "on the third day;" but there is no evidence beyond the tradition of

the fourth century to fix Bethabara so far south, whilst a position near upper Galilee would both suit the narrative and allow of the reconciliation of the two readings Bethany and Bethabara.

Bethabara is commonly spoken of as the site of our Lord's baptism. In this again we follow the fourth century tradition. From the gospel we gather nothing beyond the fact that it was the scene of certain events which are placed in the Gospel Harmonies (see Smith's Bib. Dic. p. 721) after the Temptation, and which occupied two days, seemingly consecutive, whilst on the third Jesus reached Cana of Galilee.

In a former paper (*Quarterly Statement*, April, 1875) I called attention to the fact that the name 'Abâra still applies to the principal ford of Jordan north of Beisân, and thus leading to Bashan or Batanea, whilst the site is within a day's journey of the neighbourhood of Nazareth. Against this identification all that can be urged is the tradition which places Bethabara near Jericho. It may be said also that the name is merely descriptive, and might apply to any other ford; to this I can only reply, that of more than fifty fords the names of which were collected by the Survey party, not one other had any name at all approaching in sound to this, and that, though doubtless descriptive, it is not a common name in the country, as it does not reappear in the list of 6,000 names within the limits of the Survey.

It seems difficult to understand how the name Bethabara can have been accepted by the early fathers of the church unless the site either existed in their day, or a tradition dating as early as the middle of the second century pointed to it as the site of the Bathania of the Gospel. The above notes will serve at all events to show that the topography is capable of exact explanation whichever reading be the more authentic.

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THE question of the sites of the four towns above named is interesting and somewhat complicated.

Haifa is noticed in the Talmud under its modern name (Gemara, Sabbath, 26a) and by the name Cayphas in Crusading chronicles, such as Geoffry de Vinsauf 1187, Scewulf 1102, Benjamin of Tudela 1160, and Sir John Mandeville 1322; under this title also it is marked on Marino Sanuto's map (1321). The name comes from a Hebrew root meaning "shore," and in Arabic a "mountain side," referring to its position at the foot of Carmel by the sea. The Crusaders, however, had curious ideas of the derivation of the title. According to some it was built by Caiaphas, the high priest, and named from him; others supposed a connection with the name Cephas, and referred it either to the "stonyness" of the place, or to Simon Peter, who fished there according to one account.