

THE MOABITE POTTERY.

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Consulate of the German Empire for Palestine,
Jerusalem, *November 1st, 1877.*

MY DEAR MR. SHAPIRA,—Mrs. Shapira has informed me of your departure for England on business, and, at the same time, requested me to give you in writing my detailed opinion on the present state of the disputed Moabitic question, immediately after my expedition to Moab, and to forward it to you in London.

I accede with pleasure to so reasonable a request, and hereby authorise you expressly to have the following statement translated into English, and to make such use of it as you may think fit.

According to my humble opinion, nothing at all had been positively proved respecting either the genuineness or non-genuineness of your collections before the expedition of Dr. Almkvist to Moab; nor did the learned antagonists of their genuineness—the Professors Socin and Kautzsch—finally arrive at any other result in their well-known work. The difference between myself and these gentlemen, as well as other antagonists of the genuineness, was only that I considered the falsification of the collections to be *less probable*.

The researches made by Dr. Koch in the summer of 1875 have proved it to be utterly impossible to manufacture such pottery-ware here in Jerusalem; a similar result had been already obtained, by the researches made by Mr. Drake. The pottery-ware manufactory alleged to exist at Jericho by the Sheikh Kaplan, on whose statements the local antagonists of the genuineness—Pater Antonin and Missionary Klein—are relying, has long ago been proved to have been a fable. On this occasion I may state that my most sincere exertions to obtain light in *this direction* have remained without success. Both these gentlemen always decline to name their authority, however often and urgently I begged they would do so. It was from another source only that I obtained information of Sheikh Kaplan's being one of them. No proof could therefore be established in this way, and all I can do is to consider all statements coming from that quarter as empty talk.

But if the pottery-wares have not been manufactured here, might they not have been made at Damascus, Port Said, or even in Europe? Certainly not in a position to refute these questions, I nevertheless hold such a proposition to be most improbable, especially with respect to the first collection. How could a falsifier risk so uncertain an undertaking, subject to such large expenses as this manufacture would have necessarily implied, before the Prussian Government bought the first collection? But as utterly impossible I must declare the supposition that the manufactured objects had been interred in Moab in order to give the finishing stroke to the forgery.

Whoever is acquainted with the superstition and greediness of the Bedouins will surely agree with me that they would not have permitted the execution of an undertaking, which must needs appear to them as monstrous and adventurous, such as the interment of thousands of vases and idols in the ground of which they are the sole lords and masters, and the desecration of which must unavoidably be followed by the heaviest divine punishments—to say the least, by lasting dearth; I say that the Bedouins would not have suffered all this, not even on payment of the entire sum given by the Prussian Government. How, then, about the expenses? In this case the falsifiers would, indeed, have done more than *travailler pour le Roi de Prusse*.

I cannot enter here individually on the attacks of the learned, and must limit myself to expressing my regret at the want of moderation, objectivity, and especially impartiality they manifest so frequently. Thus everything stated by M. Ganneau is declared to be proof *à priori*, and whatever falls from M. Weser is subjected to polemical criticism. One of these gentlemen goes, indeed, so far as to declare at once, that the result of Weser's expeditions of verification is null, because Selim, who was suspected of falsification, was concerned in it; but he says nothing about Pastor Weser's having also undertaken one expedition *without Selim*, during which also something has been found. This silence, however, throws a curious light on that critic. I must here ignore entirely the superficial opinions which have been put forth among the German public in consequence of the pamphlet emanating from Kautzsch and Socin, and which found expression during one of the sessions of one of our parliamentary bodies in such a manner as to appear comical to those conversant with the actual circumstances. Such was the state of affairs up to the end of last year, and this state I will resume once more in this sense, that nothing has been positively proved either for or against, except that the pottery-wares could not have been made here, and that notwithstanding a sentiment antagonistic to the genuineness pervades the circles of both scholars and laymen in Germany.

All of a sudden this state of things was altered by the expedition of Dr. Almkvist. This scholar, who set to work with the utmost distrustfulness, found in the rocky wall of a cave in the Moabitic mountains, chosen by himself at a venture, after delving for two hours, two feet deep in the rocky wall, a jar with a Moabitic inscription! But Selim was again present; yet would it be certainly insulting to these gentlemen to expect from any of them an opinion to the effect that Selim had been able to conjure also this jar into that place, surrounding it afterwards, artificially, by a rock of one mètre in thickness. Moreover, such a supposition, independently of the physical impossibility, would stamp honest Dr. Almkvist, who went to work much rather with distrust than with gushing confidence, as a liar, declaring expressly as he does that he, entirely by his own inspiration, had indicated that identical spot to commence opening the rock. The discovery made by Dr. Almkvist offers, therefore, a real proof—indeed the first—not only to the impartial, but

also even to the prejudiced observer, that pottery-wares had been lying for considerable periods in the rocky soil of Moab.

Less fortunate was the result of my own expedition, which was interrupted by the Russian war. The discovery I made represents, in my opinion, a proof only to an unprejudiced judge. After perusing so many criticisms on Weser's expeditions,—I mean besides Prof. Socin, also the learned geographer Hellwald,—one must be prepared for anything. Both my companions and myself found the caves of Kubeibe, Mack'ad, and Kyriath-Aleyan, materially changed from the description given by Almkvist. No doubt some people have continued digging after that expedition. It seems, too, that the principal proprietor, the Sheikh Mutlak, also had obtained some experience in forming an opinion on the rocks. He told us that the pottery-wares were to be found only in certain formations. Here I mentally hear the learned critics exclaim, "Ah, very well; those are Mutlak's own formations, behind which he has hidden his or Selim's manufactures." But I should like to see the great conjuror who is able to create artificially that stratum of flint protruding from the side wall of one of the caves more than one mètre high above ground, and losing itself in the depths of the earth, behind which, after excavating for several hours, we found some large fragments of clay, bearing inscriptions.

The surface (of the cave) was covered by a kind of fine grey moss, which was distributed over it like mould, having ruts worked by the passage of insects, a proof that no human hand had touched it for long periods. This stratum, which rose diagonally from below, reaching into the side wall of the cave, was burst, and soft earth had sunk into the rents. Thus we were enabled to loosen them by degrees, and, after having rolled aside several fragments of rocks of upwards of a cubic foot in diameter, we found *behind* them, in the soft earth that had fallen down, these fragments of clay, together with a small idol and several bones. After these boulders of rock had been removed, a niche in the cave was discovered behind them, which, so long as the flint stratum had not been touched, could not even have been seen, much less entered. But now my companions examined it with a lantern. They found, in a crack of the rocky ceiling over the niche, a large idol, consisting of two portions, not entirely fitting together, the front part of which shows Moabitic letters in relief, while at the back they are imprinted, as is the case with the articles of the present collections.

The gentlemen appointed to accompany me on the part of the Imperial Government,—consisting of Messrs. Schick, Councillor for Architecture, Ser Murad, first Dragoman to the Imperial Consulate, and A. Niepagen, Inspector of the Ruins of the Convent of St. John, all of whom are perfectly impartial and unconcerned in all matters relating to the disputed Moabitic question,—have declared with me that the supposition of a forgery was, under these circumstances, utterly impossible. Mr. Schick did not even consider it worth while to allege, in his technical report to the Imperial Government on the results of our expedi-

tion, all the individual elements calculated to prove the correctness of our supposition. Certainly the objections which, no doubt, will be raised against it in Berlin can, in the presence of the tangible facts in the cave, only make him smile; but I, being cognisant of the state of things there, and aware of the criticisms lavished on the results of Weser's expeditions, could not be satisfied, and, therefore, completed Schick's report in the essential points.

It is thus to be hoped that the truth may at last be known respecting this interesting question.

In the hope that the foregoing explanation may be of service to you in England, I remain, my dear Mr. Shapira, very faithfully yours,

(Signed) FREIHERR VON MUNCHHAUSEN,
Imperial German Consul in the Holy Land.

London, *Nov. 29th*, 1877.

Allow me to state here the results of my own observation:—

I observed that the rocky mountains south-east of Moab, from the upper Wadi Themad to the lower part of it, called Wadi Vali (the maps all wrongly give two separate wadis), as well as farther south to the Wady Sepha (perhaps the Supha of the Bible) and the River Arnon, consist of white soft limestone intermingled with masses of flint, as also some other harder stone called Missi in Arabic. Many holes occur in the limestone, some smaller, some larger, especially near the flint strata, which holes seem to be natural earth bubbles. The softer parts of the rock are apt to dissolve into very fine white dust, which tumbling down, and mixing with some harder pieces of stone fallen from above, in process of time petrifies, and so forms a new "rock."

The same thing must, in my opinion, have happened in the hundreds of caves I have seen, all of which are hewn in the original rock. The upper parts resolved themselves into powder, and the idols, vases, etc., hidden in the natural holes there (and used as talismans? or monuments?), also fell down to the bottom of the caves, and are, consequently, often found under ground near the rocky walls of the caves. Others, which were hidden in a hole in the midst of the rocky wall of the cave, behind a prominent row of flint, became covered by a petrifying new wall, formed in process of time from the dust, stones, or even buried pottery, which had fallen slowly from above.

Dr. Almkvist is Professor of Oriental Languages at Upsala. Mutlak, I may add, is Selim's greatest enemy, and would have long ago killed Selim if not afraid of me.

M. W. SHAPIRA.

Bodleian Library, Oxford, *Dec. 3*, 1877.

All Semitic scholars, I have no doubt, will read with the greatest