

ACCOUNT OF A SHORT JOURNEY EAST OF THE
JORDAN.

BY GUY LE STRANGE.

THE impediments which, at the present time, the Turkish Government almost invariably throw in the way of any one who attempts a journey into the country across the Jordan, and having heard of the large sums usually demanded of travellers by the Sheikhs of the Belka under plea of escort dues—emboldens me to offer this present account of a hurried trip through 'Ajlûn and the Belkâ, successfully carried out during the month of November, 1884, without Government permission, tents, baggage-mules, or blackmail. We left Nazareth on the morning of Tuesday, the 11th of November, but, as is often the case on the first day of a journey, the start was delayed by reason of trifles forgotten till the last moment, and, in consequence, the sun was already two hours on its course before we lost sight of the white houses of Nazareth and threaded the ravines down into the plain of Esdraelon. Pella was to have been the end of the first stage, but the sky was clouding up and threatening a deluge; hence even before we had passed the villages of Nain and Endor it seemed hopeless to attempt getting across the Jordan that day. The rain, however, held off till after lunch, which was discussed on the green bank of Goliath's river, the Nahr Jâlûd, which runs into the Jordan after watering Beisân, and then we walked our horses through the ruin of the beautiful Saracenic Caravanserai overhanging the stream which is known as the Khân el Ahmar, or "the Red." But an hour later, while passing through the squalid village of Beisân, and casting a hurried glance at the imposing and widespread ruins of the ancient Scythopolis of the Decapolis, down came the rain in torrents; and the sky at the same time displayed such sure tokens of something more than a passing shower, that by 4 o'clock it was determined to seek shelter and a night's lodging in the hospitable tent of an Arab whom we found camped below in the valley of the Jordan.

For about ten hours the rain continued with but little abatement, soaking through the hair walls, and dripping from the roof of our host's abode, and further causing the sheep and goats to be disagreeably anxious to participate with us in the comparative shelter which the same afforded. However, by a couple of hours past midnight the sky was again clear, and I may add that during the remainder of the trip as far as Jerusalem, the state of the atmosphere was everything that could be desired. The late autumn in Palestine, as a season for journeying and exploration, has perhaps some advantages over the spring, if only the traveller be sufficiently fortunate to happen on the six weeks or two months which generally intervene between the early autumn showers and the steady rains of winter, which last do not, as a rule, begin much before Christmas.

In the autumn, the land, having been parched by the summer heats, is of course less green and beautiful than is the case in the early days of spring ; but, on the other hand, ruins are no longer concealed by any luxuriant vegetation, and since the coolness of the weather renders a shortened halt at noon a matter of no inconvenience, the traveller can devote to the business on hand all the hours of daylight, which even at this season can be counted upon as lasting from 7 A.M. to 5 P.M. Bedouins in general are of course early risers, and we, their guests, had in consequence no difficulty in getting early into the saddle, so that before the sun had made its appearance above the mountains of Ajlûn we were riding eastwards over the fertile lands of the Ghôr, the Arab name for the mighty "cleft" through which the waters of the Jordan pour. At the present day the country all round Beisân, though partially cultivated, and fetching a certain price in the market, is not to compare with the description that has been left to us of its fertility in the century preceding the arrival of the Crusaders. Mokaddasi,¹ writing about the year 1000 A.D., describes Beisân at his time as being rich in palm trees, and informs us that all the rice used in the provinces of the Jordan, and of Palestine, was grown here. At the present day no rice is cultivated anywhere in this neighbourhood, nor for the matter of that, as far as I know, in any other part of Palestine, and the palm has long been gone from here as from the shores of the Sea of Tiberias, where, according to the geographer above quoted, there might be seen in his days "all around the Lake villages and date palms, while on the same sail boats coming and going continually."²

That the bygone prosperity might easily return to this country, should circumstances (*i.e.*, the Government) again become propitious, was an idea that impressed itself on us, each moment the more, while riding over the rich soil, and fording at every hundred yards the streams which here intersect the Ghôr. An abrupt descent brought us in an hour to the Jordan, at a ford where the water scarcely reached the bellies of our horses, and we had the luck to be guided to the right place by three of our hosts of the previous evening, who, mounted on their wirey, bald-tailed mares, and armed with the long Arab lance, had turned out to accompany us during the first few hours of the way. Across the Jordan we suddenly came upon an encampment of black tents, tenanted by kinsmen of our last night's host, and as a consequence were condemned to waste a precious hour while coffee was prepared and ceremoniously drunk, followed by a light repast of bread and sour milk ; and hence it was past nine before we reached the ruins of Pella, although these lie but an hour distant from the spot at which we forded the Jordan. As Mr. Selah Merrill very justly observes in the work which, unless I am misinformed, is as yet the

¹ Edited in Arabic by de Goeje (Leyden, 1877), p. 162.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 161. A few stunted palms are, however, still to be seen at Kufr Argib and elsewhere on the shores of the Lake (see J. Macgregor, "Rob Roy on the Jordan," 1869, pp. 325, 329 ; also, "Recovery of Jerusalem," p. 367, in Capt. Wilson's article on the Sea of Galilee).

sole fruit of the American Palestine Exploration Society, "Tabakât Fahl is a beautiful location for a city, and the wonder is that it should have been forsaken." Even after the long summer drought, the springs gushing out among the broken columns and ruins of former splendour, are abundant enough to make fertile all the neighbouring land, which, situated as it is on the upper level of the Ghôr, and 250 feet below the sea, enjoys, perhaps, the finest climate, from an agricultural point of view, that can be found in Syria.

That the Arab name of Tabakât Fahl, the Fahl Terraces, represents the ancient Greek Pella, there can be little doubt. Dr. Robinson, who was the first to make this identification, is no mean authority in such matters, and further, Mr. Merrill, who discusses the various objections which may be urged against this present site, winds up the argument by bringing together a mass of evidence in favour of this being the ancient Pella of the Decapolis, giving citations from the works of Josephus, Stephanus of Byzantium, Eusebius, and others, who treat of the early topography of Palestine.¹ It may be of some interest to add that though the site has, to all appearance, for centuries been abandoned by the Moslems, it is renowned in their early chronicles as being the field which witnessed the great "Battle of Fahl," which, six centuries after Christ, sealed the fate of Byzantine rule in Syria.² According to the annalist Tabari, this celebrated victory was gained in the year 13 A.H.,³ and the geographer Yakut asserts that the Greeks left 80,000 dead on the field.

In the first decades of the Christian era, Pliny, describing Pella, notes its abundant water supply, and in the Talmud this city is mentioned under the name of "Phahil," as having *hot* springs.⁴ At the present day, however, the springs, though abundant, are apparently not thermal. We found them icy cold, and perfectly sweet, and on this point it may be added that the Arab geographers never allude to them in their enumeration of the numerous Hammâms of the Jordan Valley. Neglecting the Greek name Pella, the Arabs, according to their wont, revived the older Semitic pronunciation of Phahil, which they wrote Fahil or Fihl. It is of interest here to note that Yakut, in his Geographical Encyclopædia,⁵ after stating the correct pronunciation of the name to be "Fihl," continues, "I believe this name to be of foreign origin, since I do not recognise in it the form of any Arab word." And that this Pella was the place which witnessed the Moslem victory over the Greek forces, is placed beyond a doubt by the further statement that "the battle of Fihl, which took place within the year of the capitulation of Damascus, is likewise known under the appellation of the Day of Beisân,"⁶ and from Beisân, on the right bank

¹ "East of the Jordan," by S. Merrill (London, 1881), pp. 442-447.

² Weil, "Gesch. der Chalifen," I, 40, *et seq.*

³ Ed. Kosegarten, II, 158.

⁴ Conder's "Handbook to the Bible," 3rd edition, p. 315.

⁵ "Mo'jam-al-Buldân" (Leipzig), III, 853.

⁶ Quoted also by the author of the "Marâsid-el-Ittilâ," ed. Juynboll, II, 336, whose work is a critical abridgment of Yakut's Encyclopædia.

of the Jordan, we had ridden in a couple of hours. Pella, or Fihl, must have fallen into ruin very shortly after the Moslem conquest, as is proved by the absence of all Saracenic remains among those of the Byzantine epoch which cover the ground in all the neighbourhood of the springs. A like fate also befell most of the great Greek cities over Jordan, such as Gerasa (Jerâsh) and Philadelphia (Ammân), where we find little that is Moslem among much that recalls the Christian times. A few generations later, after the third century of the Hejra, the very name of Fihl ceases to be mentioned in the itineraries and town lists of the Arab geographers, and neither Istakhri, Ibn Haukal, nor Mokaddasi (himself a Syrian) take any notice of the place. Still, in A.H. 278, one of the earliest of their geographers, Yakubi, considered it a place of importance, for in his summary of the cities of the military province of the Jordan (*Jond al Urdunn*), after describing such towns as Acre and Tyre, he mentions¹ together Tibnîn, Fihl, and Jerâsh, adding that "the population inhabiting these towns is of a mixed character, part Arab, part foreign" (*al 'ajam*), by which last term, if I am not mistaken, we are to understand the native Greek-speaking Christians who had not been displaced by the immigrant Arabs. Fihl, or Tabakât Fahl, as the place is now called, having thus been left undisturbed for nigh on a thousand years, would doubtless yield a rich archæological harvest to any one who could spend some days among the ruins, and carefully examine the very large number of broken cornices and other carved stones which lie about on every hand. Considerable remains of buildings also, that were once adorned with columns, surround the spot where the springs gush out from the hill-side.

Although the Jordan Valley is elsewhere parched after the summer droughts, the Fihl Gorge was a mass of waving green reeds, reaching higher than a horseman's head, and almost completely masking from view the ruined edifices which lay partially submerged in the running water. Near what must have been a bath—judging from the large piscina—stood a fine monolith in white marble, above 8 feet in height; and among the reeds, a score of yards further down, and nearer the north bank, were two others, rising, each of them, over a dozen feet out of the pool in which they stood. But nowhere did we notice inscriptions. The great centre of population would seem to have been up on the hill-side on the right or northern bank of the stream. Here there are traces of a large necropolis with innumerable sarcophagi lying about on every hand. In most cases these last had been smashed up by iconoclastic treasure-seekers, but some remained almost intact, displaying the Christian emblems beautifully carved in the white stone. One in particular was noticeable from its high artistic merit. The lid of the sarcophagus was still perfect, adorned with three wreaths chiselled in high relief, and between

them, in monogram, the , and the A.Ω. but with no further

¹ "Kitâb-al-Buldân," ed. Juynboll, p. 115.

inscription. Traces of buildings and half-buried columns lie in profusion to the south of the necropolis, on the slope overhanging the green gorge where the stream gushes out, while, doubtless, the precipitous hill which sluts in the left or southern bank of the wâdy, would repay a more detailed examination than any which has as yet been bestowed upon it. Digging would naturally be most desirable here, but much that is interesting might easily be brought to light by any one who would come armed with a crowbar, and give himself the trouble of turning over the drums and the cornices which, to all appearances, have lain in their present position since the days of the Arab invasion; and greatly do I regret that, in our hurried visit, I had neither tools with me, nor leisure time, that would have allowed of a detailed examination of this little visited ruin.

The road from Fahl to 'Ajlûn winds up the steep north bank of the Wâdy Fahl, here running east-north-east into the plateau overhanging the eastern boundary of the Jordan Valley. For the first mile the wâdy is narrow and precipitous, and the road a mere path straggling about the cliffs, a hundred feet above the dry torrent bed; but after passing a curious gap, where two giant boulders on projecting spurs have the appearance of watch towers, the gorge widens and bifurcates, the road taking the branch gulley leading in the direction east-south-east. Since Mr. Merrill has laid such stress on his discovery, in these parts, of the Roman road running between Pella and Gerasa,¹ referred to by Eusebius, and which the American archæologist regards as a final proof that Fahl is Pella, I was naturally on the look-out for traces of the same in the Wâdy Fahl. It is a disappointment for me to have to confess that though evident remains of a paved causeway are found in several places on the uplands above, yet here in the wâdy itself no traces could be discovered of cuttings in the cliff sides. I therefore conclude that the road must have approached Fahl (Pella) down some other gulley.

Three-quarters of an hour after leaving Fahl we had reached the upland rolling plain, intersected in every direction by shallow ravines, and dotted with scrub oak. Before us, in a south-easterly direction, rose the mountains of Gilead; to the right, less than a mile away, and due south, was the village of Kefr Abil; while on the left, at a distance of a mile and a half, on a low spur, appeared Beit 'Adfs. Skirting the heads of three small wâdies which lead down to the Jordan Valley, our road took a southerly direction for a couple of miles over the barren upland, after which suddenly the path plunged down off this upland into the precipitous gorge, which I believe to be an upper arm of the Wâdy Yâbis. On the height, with a path running up to it from the gorge, lies the village of Kefr Abil before mentioned, and before leaving the upland plateau, on the very brink of the wâdy, our road passed through remains of former habitations, rendered the more noticeable by the living rock having in many places been cut into to form large square tanks, measuring, roughly,

¹ *Op. cit.*, 357, 445.

in length 10 feet by 8 feet across. These were now filled up with mould so as to be flush with the surface, and have been constructed to serve as vats for oil or wine. The workmanship was assuredly ancient, and such as to do honour to the skill and perseverance of the stone-cutters of Palestine. The wâdy into which the road plunged turned off upwards into the hills in a north-easterly direction, while downwards, towards its outlet, it runs on for more than a mile due south with many smaller wâdies coming into it from the east. In this part both the main wâdy and its tributaries were, at this season, completely dry, though showing clear traces of the rush of spring freshets. The road ran down in the bed of the wâdy, and we followed it for about a mile before turning to the left into a green valley leading up in a south-easterly direction, where nestled the village of Jedaidah surrounded by olive trees and gardens. The natural beauties of this dell, the distant clatter of the two mills which were churning the waters of the brawling stream, the well-tilled fields, and the succulent grass that covered the slopes on every hand, to us invested Jedaidah with all the attributes of a rural paradise; and it being now past midday we proceeded to recruit exhausted nature with certain of the contents of our saddle-bags, while the nags lunched, even more sumptuously than we, on the fresh grass of the brook side.

Whether or not this be the main stream of the Wâdy Yâbis I was unable to ascertain, for the maps of this district are all remarkably deficient and inexact, and a villager whom I questioned was ambiguous in his replies. But from Jedeidah, as far as we could see, the stream, making a bend at right angles about a mile down the wâdy going due south, turns west again, and forcing its way through the mountains would have every appearance of coming out into the Jordan Valley at the spot where the Wâdy Yâbis is marked on the maps. All this we noted while following the path which led away in the opposite direction, for scrambling up the high spur overhanging the left bank of the stream, we proceeded nearly due east into the mountains along and up the ridge, which forms the southern boundary of the little valley where we had made the noontide halt. The wâdies here begin to be dotted with scrub oak, through which, after riding for a short hour, we came into the olive groves surrounding the hamlet of Urjân. There is collected in this village a population apparently too numerous for the accommodation provided by its houses. More than half its inhabitants have turned the caves, which honeycomb the rocks, into habitations, and thus manage to provide themselves with all the comforts of a home in the bowels of the ground. These caverns would seem to be mostly of artificial construction, having squared windows and doors, with properly situated smoke holes, but very awkward for riders, and into which, several times, it was difficult for me to prevent my horse from precipitating himself. These tenements would doubtless prove worthy of investigation by any one who, more fortunate than was the case with myself, shall have leisure to overcome the inhospitable shyness of their present occupants, and thus have the good fortune to gain admittance to these Troglodyte harems.

Beyond Urjân may be said to begin the forest of Ajlûn. At first the

hill slopes, and later on both the torrent beds and the ridges, become covered by oak trees, with an average height of between 30 and 40 feet. In the spring time, doubtless, the ground would be covered with grass and weeds, but now, in the late autumn, nothing was to be seen under the trees but the bare rocks; still from the thickness of the forest, and the low sweep of the branches, a horseman ten yards ahead was generally completely hidden from view. For a mile beyond Urjân the road keeps along the southern slope of the valley under the trees, leading steadily upward and crossing the entrances of many smaller dells, till finally it turns up one of these latter in a direction south-west by south, and round the upper end gains the summit of the ridge, whence a lovely view is obtained through the oak openings back over the Jordan Valley towards the Dead Sea. A little further on along the ridge, and about three-quarters of an hour after leaving Urjân, we passed a large circular hole in the ground, some 6 feet across, opening down into an immense cistern, now partly choked with rubbish, but the bottom of which was still 20 feet from the surface of the ground. It appeared to be bottle-shaped within, as are most of the cisterns in Palestine. In a southerly direction not far from its mouth, under the trees, were traces of ruined walls, but I was unable to obtain from the guide any information as to the name by which the place was, or had formerly been, known.

Our road still lay along the ridge in a south-easterly direction, with the broad wâdy on the left hand down which behind us lay Urjân, while on the right we were continually crossing charming glades where the oaks ever and again give place to bay trees, and through them a rider obtains picturesque glimpses over the well-wooded hills to the south-west. It was up one of these glades, or rather forming the background of an upland plain closed in on either hand by dark green mountain slopes, that we first caught sight of the Castle of Rabûd crowning a hill-top about three miles away, bearing south-south-west. From this point, which is rather more than an hour distant from Urjân, a direct road, said to be very stony, leads to the Kusr er Rabûd straight up this plain. It was, however, now past 3 o'clock, and the days being short we decided to push straight on to the town of Ajlûn, our night quarters, and put off visiting the castle till the morrow. We therefore turned up the hill-side to the south-east, and on the brow first caught sight of the town far below us, at the junction of three valleys, embowered in its gardens, its minaret and walls already gilded by the rays of the setting sun. An hour's scramble, first round the shoulder of the hill and then over into the valley which comes down on Ajlûn from the north, brought us to our destination, and for the last two miles the road lay through a succession of vineyards among the rocks, where the vines, whose leaves the autumn had turned to ruddy gold, stood out against the darker shade of ancient olive trees. The distance we had travelled perhaps lent a false enchantment to the view, but whether or not this be the cause, Ajlûn has a place in my memory as one of the most beautiful and fertile regions of Palestine that I visited, bearing comparison in this even with those far-famed villages that are watered by the rivers of Damascus. The little town is situated at the junction of three valleys, one coming from the north

down which had been our road ; another coming from the west, blocked a couple of miles distant by the spur, crowned with the Castle of Rabûd ; while opposite is the valley leading up almost due east on the road to Sûf and Jerâsh. The place contains a mosque with a tall square minaret, of fine workmanship in yellow stone ; and this last recalls so strikingly some campanile in the plains of Lombardy, that I am inclined to suppose that we have here the relics of a Christian church, perhaps of Crusader times. The town has an abundant supply of water from a spring which gushes out, not far from the mosque, under an archway of ancient masonry, which rises among ruins of columns and cornices. Modern Ajîdn is, however, but an unpicturesque collection of mud hovels, where the homestead generally consists of an agglomeration of windowless cabins surrounding a dung-heap.

In one of these cabins, having accomplished the ejection of our host's family, we proceeded to take up our night's quarters, and made an excellent dinner off the mutton and rice that had been originally prepared for his own household. It then became a burning question to my two companions whether the hospitality which they in turn were forced to offer to the fleas would allow of their enjoying the solace of undisturbed repose. For myself I was happy in being above such considerations. For, during a late trip across the Haurân, sundry insects pervading the guest chambers of my Arab hosts, having kept me for three successive nights without closing an eye, and further observing myself to be rendered incapable of archæological research through the physical exhaustion brought on by ceaseless scratching, I had, this journey, brought in my wallet a small string-hammock. Now the den in which we were quartered had, like most Arab cabins, square ventilation-holes, left under the rafters on either side below the ceiling. Through two of these holes, from without, I found I could manage to push the straight stems of a couple of long logs of firewood, in such a manner that the ends protruded very appropriately inside, like pegs standing out from the opposite wall of the room ; while the logs were jammed and prevented from being drawn completely through the holes by the gnarled and branched portion that remained without. Having thus got my pegs inside the room I proceeded to sling the hammock from them about a yard and a half above my friends and the fleas, and enjoyed thereby undisturbed repose during the night, having first been duly admired by the whole population of the village, who, during a couple of hours, were admitted in rotation to rejoice their eyes at the unaccustomed sight of a Frank in bed in a hammock.

The next morning, the 13th of November, we were up betimes, and after a thimbleful of coffee rode up, going almost due west, to the Kul'at er Rabûd, and reached it in a few minutes over the half-hour. From the Arab geographers quoted on a previous page, I have been unable to obtain any information as to the early history of this splendid fortress.¹ Raised on

¹ I find no mention of the place in the works of Yakubi, Ibn Haukal, Istakhri, Mokaddasi, or Yakut, neither does the name occur in Ibn-el-Athîr's

foundations that would appear to date from Roman days, its bastions and walls bear silent witness to the energy and skill of the Crusading Knights who, during their two century tenure of the Holy Land, erected this stronghold beyond the Jordan to hold the country of Moab and Ammon in awe. The view from its battlements is grand beyond the power of pen to describe. Looking west, the long valley of the Jordan, from the Lake of Gennesareth to the Dead Sea, lay spread out at our feet, with the windings of the Jordan itself glittering among the green brushwood, its surface being already gilded by the beams of the rising sun. Beyond and for a background were the mountains of Samaria, while on either hand lay the well-clothed hills of Ajlûn, now bronzed by the late autumn, and giving back a sheen of almost metallic lustre under the level rays of sunlight that were pouring over them. Eastward at our feet rose up the town of Ajlûn nestling at the bifurcation of the valleys, in its gardens and vineyards; and beyond, some three miles off, white in a green garland, was 'Ain Jannâ, a village on the road to Jerâsh. The castle itself crowns a height, and is surrounded by a deep moat dug out of the rock. Its vaults and halls are certainly some of the finest in Palestine, the masonry equalling that to be seen at 'Athlit, on the sea coast above Cæsarea, which is always quoted as the most remarkable of the Crusading ruins. Kusr-er-Rabûd amply deserves a more extended examination than any that has as yet been accorded to it by travellers. As I have noted above, the foundations of the building would appear to date from Roman days, for on many of the stones used in the lower walls eagles are carved, in low relief, which seemed to me of earlier workmanship than the tenth century. On the left of the gate-house high up in the wall is a tablet bearing an Arab inscription, which I was unable to come near enough to read. My readers will easily believe how about these old walls, thus perched on the mountain-top as a landmark to all the Jordan Valley, and concerning the men who first constructed its dungeons and wells and dark passages, there was an amount of mystery that it would have been most fascinating to have made some attempt at penetrating, had the time permitted of a detailed exploration. But that night we were bound to sleep at, or beyond, Jerâsh, and therefore

voluminous chronicle. However, although unnoticed among the Crusading Castles of Palestine by G. Rey, in his "*Monuments de l'Architecture Militaire des Croisés en Syrie*," an examination of the architecture and mode of construction has led me to doubt that the building is of purely Saracenic origin. I must state, however, on the other hand, that Burckhardt, who visited the place in his travels and found it occupied by a garrison, writes ("*Travels in Syria*," pp. 266, 267") that he saw Arabic inscriptions (presumably on the slab in the wall that I was unable to reach) which proclaimed that the castle was built by Saladin. Which too is further corroborated by Abu-l-Feda's Geography, a work of the fourteenth century of our era, where it is stated (p. 245 of the Arabic Text) that the Castle of Ajlûn was built by 'Izz-ed-Dîn Osâmah, one of Saladin's famous captains. Still, in spite of all this, after having examined the place, I must repeat that there is little doubt in my mind that parts of the building date from prior to the time of Saladin or even the first Crusade.

after a hurried visit we reluctantly turned our backs on the castle, and returning through the town of Ajlûn rode on, up the valley eastwards, towards 'Ain Jannâ.

On the right bank of the bed of the brook up which lay our path, and five minutes after leaving the last houses of the town, is a low cavern, used by the natives as a stable for their cattle. As far as we could see it contained no inscriptions or sculptures, and though originally, doubtless, natural, it had been artificially enlarged for the convenience of the beasts, being in most places upwards of 6 feet in height, and running deep into the hill-side for a distance that we estimated at somewhat less than fifty yards, thus affording a large area under cover, that was at the present moment much encumbered with all sorts of refuse. The distance of about a mile and a half which separates 'Ajlûn from 'Ain Jannâ is almost entirely taken up with olive trees, from which the fruit had now (November) lately been shaken; and in the market-place of the latter village we passed three huge caldrons filled with crushed berries set in a little water to simmer over a slow fire, this being one of the methods of extracting the oil. Beyond 'Ain Jannâ the road still continues straight up the valley almost due east, and, on the northern hill slope about half-a-mile from the village, passes beside a couple of rock-cut tombs overhanging the bed of the stream, the second of the two still containing a broken sarcophagus without ornament. A short distance beyond these we come on the source of the brook, where it wells up from a hole under a rock in the middle of the valley. The stream runs down from here through 'Ain Jannâ, and even at this season suffices to water all the lands between this and 'Ajlûn. Above this point, although no water was visible, oak groves of considerable extent lay on every hand, and the path, after traversing a rocky glen where the branches of the trees almost met above our heads, came to a more open space where at a couple of miles above 'Ain Jannâ the roads to Irbid and Sûf bifurcate. Of these we followed the latter, bearing slightly towards the right and in a southerly direction, through park-like glades, and in half-an-hour reached the saddle which forms the watershed between the valleys of Ajlûn and Sûf. At this point a fine view was obtained over the way before us, running through the broad valley winding down towards Jerâsh in a direction a little south of east. The ground about here was dotted with oak trees and scrub, but the growth became smaller and the clumps more sparse the further we left Ajlûn behind, till at last, near Sûf, about three miles from the saddle, the trees had disappeared almost entirely. Before reaching this village the valley narrows to a gorge shut in by white chalk cliffs, and the track, after climbing among those which overhang the ravine to the south, leads suddenly down on the squalid cabins of the inhabitants.

The Sheikh of Sûf has so evil a reputation among travellers for both cupidity and insolence that, it being yet an hour to lunch time, we decided on hurrying on without paying him a visit; but that we did not make some acquaintance with the people of the village was a cause of

subsequent regret to me, when I heard that they held in their hands many of the coins and antiquities which are brought to them for sale by the Circassians who are colonising Jerâsh. There were, in particular, rumours of a pot said to have been dug up in this neighbourhood, and reported to have contained countless gold coins of large size, which same had not all of them, as yet, been delivered over into the hands of the officials of the Ottoman Government, to whom all treasure-trove is lawfully due. The finding of hoards is of by no means rare occurrence in Palestine, where the people have at all times been their own bankers, and have ever preferred confiding their hard-earned gains back to the bosom of mother earth, rather than entrust them, for safe keeping, to friends in whom they could place no trust, knowing well that they themselves, in the like position, would, without a question, deem it imbecile to be fettered by any shackles of honesty or honour. The road from Sûf to Jerâsh, which we travelled over during a ride of rather more than an hour and a half, has been so well described in guide books as to need no detailed notice. For the most part the path follows the hill-slopes on the southern side of the broad shallow wâdy which runs down in an easterly direction till it joins that wherein lies Jerâsh, which is a valley joining it from the south. Shortly after leaving Sûf, far down to the left of the road and on the northern hill-slope, a ruin was pointed out to us by our guide which our time did not permit of our visiting, but as he assured us that it was the remains of some ancient, edifice it may perhaps repay the examination of some future traveller with leisure at command. Even before reaching Sûf, as noticed above, the aspect of the country had changed. The thick oak forest, which is so characteristic of the Ajlûn hills, had been replaced by single stunted trees, pines and scrub oaks, dotted sparsely over the hill-sides; beyond Sûf the slopes became almost bare, and in all the country to the east and south of Jerâsh the land is for the most part treeless, and only an occasional pollarded oak cuts the sky line of the hill-top.

Riding across the hills from Sûf, Jerâsh becomes visible from the village of Deir-el-Leyyeh, a couple of miles from the ruins, which are seen spread out below in the broad valley running north and south. From this upper point, where, at the bottom of a hole in the rock, there is a spring, all along the road lie fragments of sarcophagi and carved stones, showing how extensive must have been the suburbs and necropolis of the Roman city. Jerâsh, or Gerasa, has been too often and too well described to require more than a passing notice in these pages. At the time of our visit the Circassians had possession of the place, but had fortunately taken up their abode on the left bank of the stream, where the ruins are comparatively insignificant, and they had not as yet begun to meddle with the magnificent theatres, colonnades, and temples crowding the right bank, and which are, Palmyra perhaps excepted, the most extensive and marvellous remains of the Græco-Roman rule in Syria. The prosperity of the town, despite its fine situation and plentiful water supply, diminished considerably after the expulsion of the Byzantines. The locality, however, is mentioned by Yakûbi, a couple of centuries after the Moslem conquest,

as being in his time one of the towns of the Jordan province; and again the poet al-Mutanabbi, one of the most celebrated of those who flourished at the Court of Baghdad, in a panegyric, devotes some lines to the praise of the fertility of the Crown domains at Jerâsh. But, except for such incidental notices, if I mistake not, the city is rarely mentioned by the subsequent Arab geographers and historians; though Yakût, in the thirteenth century A.D., who had not himself visited the spot, writes that it was described to him by those who had seen it as "a great city, now a ruin, . . . through which runs a stream used for turning many mills; . . . it lies among hills that are covered with villages and hamlets, the district being known under the name of the Jerâsh Mountain."¹ Whatever may have been the original cause of its depopulation, it is very noticeable that the ruins of Jerâsh up to the present day have been but little disturbed. There has never been any great Moslem city in its neighbourhood, and hence its columns remain *in situ* or, thrown down by the earthquake, sprawling along the ground, while the stones of the Great Temple of the Sun and of the theatres are fortunate in having been, as yet, unpilfered for building material. Further, since there is in these regions no sand to drift over and veil the outlines, and the frequent drought preventing the ruins from becoming masked by vegetation, all that remains stands out, white and glaring, in noontide, having that same appearance of recent desolation which is so striking a characteristic of the freshly cleared streets of Pompeii.

After lunching on the bank of the stream, among the gigantic oleanders that, still in November, were covered with delicate pink flowers, we passed the afternoon riding about, examining the ancient city, combining archæological investigations with the keeping of a good look-out against prowling Circassians, and at sundown proceeded out of the southern gate, past the circus, now a meadow, and through the fine Triumphal Arch at the town limit. Here turning to the left, we crossed the stream at the mills and began to climb the conical hill on which stands the Moslem village and sanctuary of Neby Hûd, where it was determined to claim for ourselves hospitality, and safe night quarters for our horses, against the thievish propensities of the Christian Circassians.

The view from this high point is extremely fine, and embraces all the valley and ruins of Jerâsh looking north. While the guest-room was being swept out the elders came round and discoursed on their grievances, against the Government in general, and their new Circassian neighbours in particular. These last are a thorn to the Moslems in their agricultural operations, and further debar them from poking about for treasure among the vaults and cisterns of Jerâsh, a city built, as one of the sheikhs was good enough to inform me, by his own ancestors, the 'Adites, of the Days of Ignorance. After supper till near midnight had we to listen to and discuss politics with these worthy people, among whom the arrival of a traveller is a rare accident, and we three being Christians and they

¹ *Op. cit.*, II, 61.

Moslems, points of religion were often incidentally touched upon to the exceeding happiness of our Arab guide, who was a red hot Protestant and polemic. Despite religious differences, however, we remained excellent friends, and ultimately all slept together in the guest chamber, the party consisting of our three selves, the sheikhs, and the children. During the night an occasional dog chased goats over our prostrate forms, and the fleas hopped about merrily, which combined prevented our oversleeping ourselves. Hence by half-past six next morning (Nov. 14th) we had saddled our horses, and, breakfastless, were off for 'Ammân, to which place it had been determined to proceed by the direct road across country, without going first south-west to Salt and thence back south-east to Ammân, the route generally followed by the caravans. This direct road is hilly, and there have to be crossed numberless valleys, which from the east intersect the tableland lying between Jerâsh and Ammân; it is but little used, and, as far as I could learn, has been seldom described by previous travellers. To us its being the less known was, of course, a recommendation; besides, as we had no wish to excite the attention of the officials of the Belkâ, it was perhaps as well to avoid visiting Salt, the residence of the Governor of that province.

Starting from Neby Hûd in a south-easterly direction, after half-an-hour we crossed at right angles the Wâdy Riyâshî, running south-west, and down which lies the direct road to Salt. At the point where we forded the brook is a ruined mill almost hidden in the mass of oleanders and fig trees bordering the bed of the stream, which, it is said, joins the Jerâsh river a short distance before this latter itself falls into the Zerkâ. We, however, turning towards the south, left the Riyâshî behind us, and making our way up the hill slopes above its left bank, here most refreshingly dotted with scrub oak, in rather more than half-an-hour had gained the summit of the watershed which divides the valley of Jerâsh from that of the Zerkâ. The saddle across which the road lay commanded a fine view on either hand, the summit being marked by a cairn of stones a dozen feet high, erected to mark the spot where a celebrated chief had been slain. From here to the right, westwards, there was visible the lower part of the valley of Jerâsh, separated from us by several ranges of bare hills. To the left, and in front towards the south, lay the hills of the Belkâ, cut off from us by a deep gorge, at the bottom of which, as yet unseen, ran the Zerkâ, the Biblical Jabbok, in ancient times the boundary between the territories of Og, the King of Bashan, and of Sihon, King of the Amorites, and still to-day the limit to the north of the Belkâ province. The hills all round were barren and stony, here and there a pollarded oak struggled for existence against the drought and the loss of its branches, which the Bedouins cut off for fuel, and everything seemed lifeless and forlorn, until suddenly, as we were making our way down a steep spur to the bed of the Zerkâ, we came on an encampment of three black tents, hidden away in a delicious little dell, down which went brawling a tiny stream. The Bedouin men were all away with the flocks, but the women received us hospitably, started coffee-making, and the

while were profuse in advice and directions as to the road we were to follow. They belonged, they said, to the Khaza 'Ali, a branch of the Beni Hasan, one of the great tribes of the Belkâ, and seemed in comfortable circumstances. Very pretty striped carpets of goat hair were spread for us to sit on in the shade of the goat-hair walls, and though our hostess was more remarkable for her perpetual chatter than for graces of person, she seemed extremely proud of the rings which adorned both thumb and little finger of her right hand and the two big toes of her feet. What between conversation, coffee-making, and the setting before us of bread and milk, it was fully an hour before we could tear ourselves away from our gossiping hostess, but at last we set off again up the hill spur, and then began once more zigzagging downwards. A final scramble brought us into a small amphitheatre debouching on to the river, the slopes of which were covered with the curious shrub called by the Arabs "Yenbût," its long fleshy green twigs or leaves, of the thickness of crochet needles, brushing against our faces as we pushed our way through the tangle.

The bed of the Zerkâ, at this season only some three yards broad, and barely a foot deep, is bordered with the "Daflah," or oleander, still showing an occasional pink flower among its dark green leaves. The sides of the gorge in which the river runs are here extremely steep, in places almost perpendicular, and while further to the west, down the river, the valley appears to open out, up eastward the mountains on either hand closed in more and more, till in the extreme distance the stream makes its way out of a gigantic cleft where high precipices would seem almost to meet a thousand feet above the water. At the spot where we now crossed, the Wâdy Zerkâ has a level pebbly bottom above two hundred yards across, which during the freshets must be almost totally submerged. Riding straight across this we proceeded to pick out a torrent bed among the many that cut through the cliffs overhanging the river on the south, and after half-an-hour's climb up a very steep wâdy, we were again on the high uplands, whence, looking back over the gorge, we could trace our late route among the hills of Jerâsh. Continuing on through a broad upland valley dotted with trees, before long there appeared a small village of mud cabins,—among which was a blacksmith's shop in full blast,—clustering together under the shade of a grove of oaks, many of them of no inconsiderable size. The place is called 'Alûk, and is situated about two miles distant from the Zerkâ, due south of the spot at which we came across the river. From 'Alûk the road towards 'Ammân first runs due east for a couple of miles over the upland, crossing every now and again the head of some wâdy running down towards the left into the gorge of the Zerkâ; and finally, bearing round towards the south, crosses a hill shoulder from which back over the gorge and the hills the white dome of Neby Hûd can be made out in the far distance. The country over which we were now travelling may be described as a rolling upland cultivated in patches by the Bedouin, and in places overgrown by brushwood, scrub oak, and yanbût. Among these hollows and hills we frequently lost our way and wandered about till set on the right path by chancing to stumble

on some small camp of black tents, occupied by the women who were herding the camels in the absence of their lords.

Several times in this part of the country we passed "Arab circles" of small boulder stones, and on one occasion, under a fine Butm tree, came on what was evidently the tomb of a much respected sheikh, to judge from the corn measures and the plough which had been deposited within the circle of the shrine for safe keeping. About four miles from Alûk, and roughly to the south-east of it, topping a low hill over which lies the road, are the ruins of a building that was originally constructed of squared stones, but of which nothing is now traceable except the general rectangular plan. The place is known by the name of Sarrîj, and is used by the people as a storing place for grain. Some Arabs who were here, occupied in cleaning corn, invited us to go on to a large encampment of their tribe, the Beni Hasan, which they pointed out in a hollow a mile further off. Here the black tents, fifteen in number, and of the largest size, were pitched in two lines facing east. On stopping to inquire and give the news, we were requested by the sheikh to administer relief to an unfortunate Arab who lay at the back of the tent suffering from failing breath, in what appeared the last stage of consumption, a disease that is said to be of no uncommon occurrence among the Bedouin. The case, however, as far as we could judge, was beyond the reach of medicine, and there was no physician among us, so with expressions of sympathy, and a few general directions as to the patient's comfort, we took leave and continued our way up over a hill to the south-east, from whence was overlooked a broad shallow valley, not unlike that in which is situated Jerâsh. This valley, the drainage of which is towards the north, runs up at a very slight gradient in a direction almost due south, for over six miles. It is called by the Bedouin of the Beni Hasan, Wâdy Khallâ, or Khallî, and affords good pasture to their herds, which find water at several shallow wells that occur in its bed. The sheep and goats that are here met with are of a remarkably fine breed, large in size and having heavy fleeces. The bell-weather of each flock is distinguished by a sort of crown of gaudily coloured feathers attached to the back of the neck just behind the ears, the wool in its neighbourhood being further dyed red with henna. As we proceeded up this valley, which is everywhere dotted with oak trees and thorn, there appeared a ruin on the right hand, high up the slope of the hills shutting in the valley from the west, where by our glasses we could perceive, as we thought, the remains of walls. It is known by the names of Khurbet-er-Rumanèh and Khurbet-el-Bireh, but being much pressed for time it was found impossible to visit the spot, which, further, our guide assured us, was at the present day but little more than a heap of stones. A short distance beyond, where we lost sight of the ruin, the valley takes a sharp turn to the right, and then back into a south-westerly direction, which following we soon after turned up into a branch wâdy coming in from the west, and happily came to the main encampment of the Beni Hasan, it being already two hours after midday. Here twenty-four long black tents, pitched in double row,

took up the whole of the floor of the wâdy, and to that of the sheikh, conspicuous by its superior size, we proceeded to pick our way over the tent ropes, and made ourselves the recipients of Bedouin hospitality.

First came the customary thimbleful of coffee—roasted, pounded, and boiled up in our presence; then followed a more substantial repast of excellent new Arab bread—resembling thick pancakes—which was seasoned by being dipped bit by bit in a bowl of melted butter; then coffee once more, and in an hour we were on our road again, having given our hosts the latest items of political news, and received from them in return minute directions as to the path. Returning back into the main wâdy, the track runs up it some little way, and then turning south-west crosses a low shoulder. From this point there is one road leading almost due west, up a wâdy, going direct to es Salt, while that towards Ammân keeps on in a south-westerly direction over the rolling country, and cuts across many minor wâdies that run down from the east. Near the point of bifurcation of these two roads there is a small clump of Butm or Terebinth trees, at the foot of which are lying the shafts of two broken columns. The larger of them is a monolith some 9 feet long, and is cut out of the piece in such a manner that the base, 4 feet high and about 2 feet in diameter, tapers down to the shaft of half this size, the whole being very neatly executed in white limestone. A mile further on again, where the road runs along the western slope of a shallow wâdy, we passed fragments of six more broken columns of about the same size as the above, but since no further trace of any temple or building was to be seen in the neighbourhood, one is led to the supposition that these fragments have at some period been transported hither from the great centre of ruins at Yajûz. We were now travelling along a raised causeway, the remains of a Roman road, running over the undulating plain, which is covered here and there by patches of corn land, and after a couple of miles our horses began to stumble among stones of Yajûz; but as the sun had already gone down, archæology was out of the question, and it was necessary to discover, without further delay, the whereabouts of the Bedouin camp in which it was our intention to pass the night. Turning, therefore, off the road at right angles towards the west, a goatherd directed us to a slight depression in the plain where, after twenty minutes riding, we came suddenly on about a dozen tents of the Beni Adwân, and without unnecessary ceremony pressed ourselves on the hospitality of the somewhat surly sheikh. The night was bitterly cold, and, what between the wind and the fleas, and the extremely confiding nature of the ewes, who, for warmth's sake, were always trying to insinuate themselves beneath our blankets, sleep was fitful. Further, and as usual, till far into the night, our Arab friends discussed in strident tones politics and finance, for, as every traveller knows to his cost, these worthies have such a habit of sleeping at odd hours during the day, that at night being wakeful, they are sadly addicted to interminable discoursings. Discomfort only ceased with the dawn-chill, and, being up betimes, when the sun rose in splendour over the rolling uplands, here in most parts covered with the growth of a plant resembling heather, we were already on

our way back to the road into Yajûz, out of which we had turned the night before.

At the entrance of the ruins is a large clump of some of the finest Terebinth trees that ever I came across. In their immediate neighbourhood is a large Arab cemetery, the most prominent tomb of which is that of Nimr ibn Gobelân, a sheikh of the 'Adwân, whose death, according to the inscription on the headstone, took place A.H. 1238, *i.e.*, some sixty and odd years go. His memory is still held in awe among the Bedouin, as is proved by the numerous ploughs and other farm implements that lie round his tomb, left there for safe keeping, as in a sanctuary. One of the 'Adwân, our host of the previous night, who accompanied us a short distance on our journey, informed me that this spot is known under the name of A'deyl, and is considered distinct from Yajûz, the ruins of which extend from it eastwards for more than a mile. These ruins, now known by the Arabs under the above name, have been so fully described in their respective works by Mr. Oliphant and Dr. Merrill¹ that further details may be deemed superfluous. It is noteworthy, however, that all attempts at identification seem to have failed, although the extensive remains of carved Byzantine capitals, squared blocks, and the foundations of numerous edifices which crowd both sides of this broad upland valley would lead us to conclude that there must have existed here a very populous town during the Græco-Roman period. It may be worth noting that in the lists of the Arab geographers there is no mention of the name Yajûz; nor was there in the days of the Caliphate, so far as I can discover, any considerable town that agrees in point of situation with the site of these ruins. The caves with which the hill slopes are honeycombed are still used by the 'Adwân as granaries, but apparently no settled inhabitants are found in the neighbourhood.

After spending some time in riding in every direction over these interesting remains, and seeking in vain for anything in the way of an inscription or a date, we proceeded in a south-easterly direction, still over a rolling country that showed ever and anon patches of cultivation. The shallow wâdies that the track crosses for the most part run down towards the east, presumably into the depressed plain of El Bukeia; however, for some miles round the whole district here about is known under the name of Yajûz. Half-an-hour after leaving the ruins we passed a large nameless heap of disjointed but squared masonry, lying in the shade of some Butm trees growing on a hill slope facing the north. From here the path, turning up the wâdy towards the east, crosses some low hills, and finally surmounting the crest, leads down into a curiously long and narrow plain: apparently the bed of an ancient lake, as I should judge, analogous to that which once filled the depressed plain of El Bukeia, lying some miles over to the north-west of our present point. Wending down the slopes which, just before reaching the level, showed successive lines of pebbly beach and water-worn banks, we descended to the ancient lake bottom, here some 400 yards broad, and as even as a billiard table. The Arabs of the

¹ "Land of Gilead," p. 227, *et seq.* "East of the Jordan," p. 273, *et seq.*

Adwân call this tract of land Hemel Belka, and cultivate the rich alluvial soil in patches, raising crops of wheat and maize (*durra*). From the point we struck it, the plain extends for the distance of about a couple of miles due south, having an average breadth that might be estimated at a quarter of a mile, and then bears off in a south-easterly direction, draining down in all probability into the Zerkâ Valley, which, according to the maps, curves round towards it. Where the angle occurred we came up out of the narrow plain, and striking over the hills to the south-south-west passed another nameless ruin, where confused heaps of masonry are crowned by a few small, but most elegant, oval arches, which passed, once again we found ourselves on the upland plain that trends down south towards Ammán.

The land here, after the early rains, was undergoing the process of being ploughed and sown by the Fellahîn of the Beni Adwân. At one moment we could count above thirty yoke of oxen, and the wonted stillness was agreeably enlivened by the shouts of the ploughmen, who, in more than one case, were engaged in directing the capricious evolutions of camels that had been compelled to take the place of the more docile steers. Considering the ungainly size of the camels and the diminutive wooden plough to which they were so clumsily harnessed, it was assuredly a marvel of skill that the furrows ran in passably straight and parallel lines. The camels evidently loathed the business, and to judge by the objurgations of their drivers—who were continually calling heaven to witness that their (the camels') clumsiness was the natural consequence of a dissolute life and a disreputable ancestry,—the camel-men themselves were not enamoured of their job. For a considerable time we passed patch after patch being ploughed in this fashion, and riding over a treeless plateau at length struck back into the high road running south-east from Yajûz to 'Ammân, which we had left to our right in turning off to visit the ruins and the Hemel Belka. After this, very shortly came a rather steep wâdy in a cross direction, running due east, down which the path led, and in a few minutes more we found ourselves for the second time in the Valley of the Zerkâ, and the ruins of 'Ammân were before us.

In these notes; however, the ruins being fully described in all the guide books, it would be waste of time attempting to recall the wonders of Greek architecture that have hitherto lain peacefully entombed beyond the Jordan, but which are now given over by the Ottoman Government to be a habitation for Circassian colonists. At the house of one of these worthies, while being hospitably entertained with tea and new bread, I endeavoured, but in vain, to gain some information concerning the whereabouts of the curious subterranean city of Rahab that Mr. Oliphant, in "The Land of Gilead," reports having heard spoken of as existing in the country to the east of the Zerkâ. All we could learn was that some people had heard tell in stories of this place, but no one at 'Ammân had seen the spot or knew of its exact position. As confirming these somewhat vague notices, it may be, perhaps, worth while to draw attention to the account which Mokaddasi, in the beginning of the eleventh century A.D., gives of a remarkable

cavern in these parts. After describing 'Ammân, where he notes "the Castle of Goliath on a hill overlooking the city, and also the tomb of Uriyyâ (Uriah ?), over which stands a mosque,"¹ he continues: "About a farsakh (three miles) distant from 'Ammân, on the border of the desert, is the village of ar-Rakîm. Here is a cave with two gates, one small, one big, and they say that he who enters by the larger gate is unable to pass by the smaller. On the floor of the cavern are three tombs, concerning which Abul Fadl Muhammed ibn Mansur has related to me the following, on the authority of Abu Bekr ibn, &c.," and after giving his chain of authorities, which reaches back to 'Abd Allah, the son of the Khalif Omar, he reports how the Prophet had said that these were the tombs of certain pious men, who, seeking shelter from the rain, had entered this cave and been shut in by the fall of a rock which blocked up completely the entrance. The impediment, however, was miraculously removed by the hand of the Most High, on their calling to Heaven for aid, and every man conjuring the Almighty, and resting his claim on the virtue of some especially pious act performed in past times. The legend is here not to the purpose, and is besides too long to quote in extenso, it being merely another version of the story of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, whose adventures form the subject of a portion of the eighteenth chapter of the Koran; but as confirming the reported existence of some large cavern or underground city in the neighbourhood of 'Ammân, the account is curious, and it shows at how early a date such a report had obtained currency.

From 'Amman it was our intention to get across to Jerusalem, *via* Arâk el Emir, but since the route is well described in the invaluable Bædeker, no detail of distances and directions need here be given. Riding up the bank along the now diminutive stream of the Zerkâ, we passed an abundant spring that forms one of its sources, and climbing the northern side of the wâdy gained the treeless upland plain stretching westward. Over this, a ride of two hours brought us to the cleft of the Wâdy Sîr, a well-wooded ravine that drains into the Jordan Valley, and in which, but still some miles lower down, lie the remains known as 'Arâk el Emir. At the spot, where we left the bare upland plain to plunge into the green wâdy, the ruins known as Khurbet Sâr are but a short distance to the left, while across on the opposite side there were visible the mouths of several small caverns or chambers hollowed in the face of the cliff, and we noticed other specimens of these abodes of bygone anchorites in many places further down the gorge. Half-way down the steep path that leads into the dell there opens out a small plain, at present occupied by some Circassian families, who have built here a village of wattle and dab houses exactly similar to those that are met with in the neighbourhood of Tiflis. But we had to hurry on without visiting them, for the afternoon was waning.

The whole gorge of the Sîr is most beautifully wooded; two mills are turned by the stream that flows through it, and while its sides are almost

¹ Mokaddasi, *op cit.*, p. 175.

everywhere hidden by the dark foliage of the oaks and other forest trees, the margin of the brook is masked by a broad fringe of oleanders that grow here to a height of over 14 feet. In a little meadow, where the cliff on the right bank recedes from the water's edge, and about two miles above 'Arâk el Emir, there is a collection of Arab "circles," of a somewhat abnormal type. The stones are about a foot high, and form the perimeter of a circle that is roughly a couple of yards across. What is unusual, however, is that here the area surrounded by this low circular wall has been roofed over by laying branches rafter-wise, and filling in with straw, the whole being afterwards covered by a coat of clay. There was, as usual, a sort of doorway left in the circle of stones, and in the present instance it faced south. These little buildings have every appearance of being intended for habitations of some sort, only that while the extreme lowness of the roof and the small extent of the covered space would render the ingress of any human being an impossibility, the clean condition of the interiors showed that they were evidently not intended to serve as pens for lambs or other small quadrupeds. Further, our Arab guide immediately recognised them as marking the burial places of sheikhs, reminding us of the very similar, though unroofed circles which we had passed by in the hills on many previous occasions during our journey.

After riding down the Wâdy Sir for nearly two hours, the path lying sometimes in the very bed of the pebbly brook, sometimes along the meadows which skirted its banks, and at times again threading the copses that overhung its winding course, we came out suddenly into the magnificent amphitheatre of hill-cliffs where is situated 'Arâk el Emir—said to be the remains of the palace which, according to Josephus, Hyrcanus built in 182 B.C., during the last days of his exile beyond the Jordan. In the main the description of the Jewish historian tallies well enough with what we find here of rock-cut caverns, and cyclopean masonry carved with forms of huge animals. It is, however, perhaps a point worth noting, and one that did not fail to strike me when I first came on the ruins of the Kusr-el-Abd, that while Josephus plainly states that Hyrcanus "built it entirely of *white* stone to the very roof, and had animals of a prodigious magnitude engraved thereupon," when we come to examine here the carved blocks, alongside of which the inquisitive traveller feels dwarfed to the dimensions of an insect, we find that they are all, without exception, cut out of stone most remarkably *black*. But as Josephus had himself never visited this place, the error is probably due to his having been misinformed by the hearsay report of contemporary tourists. The remains at 'Arâk el Emir, whatever may be their date, cannot fail to strike the traveller with somewhat of that same feeling of awe which he experiences on standing for the first time beside the huge stones at Baalbek, the platform of Persepolis, or the Egyptian Pyramids. Greek and Roman ruins are dwarfed into insignificance beside these, for they tell of an age when labour and time were held as of no account in the calculations of those who built for themselves such temples, palaces, or tombs. It was with difficulty that we tore ourselves away from these wonderful relics of a bygone civilization. But

already the sun was hiding behind the western hill, and while we were lingering in the artificial caverns high up in the cliff, they became shrouded in gloom, though the bold characters of the Hasmonean inscription on the rock above,—read “Adniah,” and said to mean “Delight,”—still stood out distinct in the blush that was already dying from the face of the black masonry in the meadow below.

We had yet to beat up night quarters, and therefore scampering up the shoulder of the projecting spur shutting in the amphitheatre on the south, we crossed into a wādy known as that of Umm el Madāris, and shortly coming across some homeward-bound cattle were directed by the neat-herd to the encampment of his tribe, the Beni 'Abbād, located in an adjacent dell. We were now among the wādies that lead down directly to the Jordan Valley, and just before coming to the tents, while riding over the crest of an intervening spur, suddenly there burst on us a most magnificent view of the Dead Sea, spread out apparently at our feet. From the height, its whole surface, as far as the eye could reach, appeared like a sheet of burnished gold about to become molten, under the rays of the setting sun, whose orb was fast vanishing behind the blue hills of the desert of Judæa; and below, in the foreground, was the opening out of the Jordan Valley, here some ten miles across—Jericho, as a patch of black green foliage, shining out distinct on the further side.

Although the Beni 'Abbād were hospitable, and their carpets were tolerably free from vermin, the coldness of the night, and the continuous groaning of one of the men who had lately received a spear thrust in his leg, rendered our sleep but fitful. Besides, as usual, our hosts took up the best part of the night detailing their grievances to us, and requested our advice on the important point of how £100 might be obtained on loan to rid them of their enemies. It appeared that certain lands belonging from time immemorial to their tribe, for which, moreover, they held title deeds, had been by Government granted to, and were occupied by, the immigrant Circassians. We suggested that a petition forwarded with the title deeds to the Government would doubtless set matters right, but in reply we were assured that so doing, unless much bakhshish went with the papers, would only lead to the loss of the deeds without there being the smallest chance of the tribe obtaining any re-establishment in their rights. Cheaper than this, they said, it would be to bribe the Circassians to decamp and take up their quarters on somebody else's land, and for this purpose a hundred pounds were needed, which we, however, perforce, deeply regretted being unable to put them in the way of obtaining.

Next morning we were up before the sun, for there was the long ride into Jerusalem before us. Distances in the East, even after long practice, appear most deceptive, especially when looking from a height down and across a plain. The Jordan seemed almost at our feet, but it was four hours' good riding before we reached the ford and crossed the swirling muddy stream, which, even at this season, in some places rose above the horses' girths.

When leaving the mountains and riding between the last hill spurs out

into the Ghôr, I judge we must have passed within a short distance of Tell esh Shâghûr, which recent writers propose to identify with Segor, or Zoar, one of the Cities of the Plain. Dr. Merrill, who discusses the question of the site at some length,¹ concludes by stating that to his mind the arguments for placing the Zoar of Lot at the north end of the Dead Sea are convincing, adding, "We present here a few quotations from Arab writers which bear upon this question." But from these "quotations" I venture to think he deduces an erroneous conclusion, through not bearing in mind the fact that the narrow valley leading *south* from the Dead Sea towards the Gulf of Akabah was known to the Arabs as the Ghôr, and hence bears the same name as that applied by them to the Jordan Valley itself running up *north* from that lake.

Whatever may be concluded from the Bible as to the true position of the Zoar of the Pentateuch, a careful examination of the Arab geographers leads me to conclude that they, at least, stuck to the traditions preserved by Josephus, and followed by Eusebius and Jerome, which place Zoar or Segor to the south-east of the Dead Sea. This place, further, is identical with that frequently mentioned under the name Segor by the historians of the Crusades, and is found in many of the itineraries of the mediæval travellers. To the Arab geographers Zughar, the city of Lot, was as well known a place as Jerusalem or Damascus, seeing that the Dead Sea, more generally called by them Al Buhairah-al Muntinah, "The Stinking Lake," has also the alternative name of the Sea of Zughar. Further, it is evident that there were not, for these mediæval geographers, *two* Zughars, for in Yakut's Mushtarik, a Lexicon of Geographical Homonyms, which especially deals with cities of the same name but of different location, the name Zughar does not figure in the list. Turning now to Mokaddasi, who was himself a native of Palestine, and wrote during the century preceding the first Crusade, we find that Zughar (also spelt Sughar) is mentioned as being in his day the capital of the province of the Sharât² (which corresponds in general with the ancient Moab), and he cites it as the sole remaining city of Lot, "saved by reason that its inhabitants knew not of the abominations." As to its position, it is described as standing on (or near) the Dead Sea, with the mountains near about it;³ while that it is to be sought at the south-eastern end of the Lake is shown by the statement that it is one marhalah (twenty-five miles—a day's march) distant from Maâb, a town situated in the desert to the east of Kerak; and four marhalahs from Wailah,⁴ the port at the head of the Gulf of Akabah. Also Istakhri⁵ and Ibn Haukal,⁶ geographers of the generation preceding Mokaddasi, state that between Jericho and Zughar lay "a day's march," and in one case other MSS. give the alternative but

¹ "East of the Jordan," 233, *et seq.*

² Mokaddasi, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 178.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 192, 249.

⁵ Edit. de Goeje, p. 66.

⁶ Edit. de Goeje, p. 126.

probably erroneous reading, "two days' march." At this epoch, that is, during the eleventh century A.D., Zughar was a place of considerable trade, famed for its indigo and dates, these last being of exquisite quality, and quoted as one among the eight kinds celebrated in all the countries of Islam.¹ On the other hand, the climate of Zughar was deadly, and its drinking water execrable, "hot even as though it were over hell fire,"² and later, when characterising the drinking water of Palestine as generally so excellent, Mokaddasi exclaims,³ "but we take refuge in Allah from that of Zughar, though the water of Bait-er-Râm is in truth bad enough."

Turning now to the great Geographical Dictionary of Yakut, compiled in the early part of the thirteenth century A.D., we find two long articles, one under the heading Sughar, and another under the alternative pronunciation of Zughar.⁴ After quoting the verse of a poet who sings of the "southern region of the Sharât from Maâb to Zughar," Yakut proceeds to give various traditions which connect the town with the history of Lot, and says that its name came to it from one of Lot's daughters. Finally it is stated that Zughar is situated in the neighbourhood of the Dead Sea, in a wâdy; it being three days' journey from Jerusalem, and lying near the frontiers of the Hejâz.⁵ Lastly, and not further to multiply quotations, the author of the *Meracid*, writing about a century after Yakut, after quoting his words as to the position of Zughar on, or near, the Dead Sea, adds that it lies near Kerak.⁶

In conclusion, therefore, and in opposition to Dr. Merrill, I find no authority among such of the Arab geographers as I have read for locating the Zughar or Zoar of their day anywhere but to the south-east of the Dead Sea. For, to sum up their indications, the city stood near the Dead Sea; one day's march from Maâb, the same from Jericho, and four from the head of the Gulf of Akabah; three days' march from Jerusalem, and near Kerak; from all of which it would appear impossible that a town across the Jordan opposite Jericho should be intended; while the assertion that the water at Sughar was execrable, of itself indicates that Tell esh Shâgûr, in the wâdy below Arâk el Emir, where excellent springs abound, can hardly be a satisfactory identification.

From the Jordan up to Jerusalem we rode along the beaten track that every Cook's tourist has followed. The ghastly barrenness of the country, and the glare from the chalky hills among which the road winds, renders this one of the most tedious bits of journeying in Palestine, and we were fortunate in being able to accomplish the ride from Jericho to Jerusalem in five hours. It is, however, worth while to come up this

¹ Mokaddasi, p. 470.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 178.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 184.

⁴ Wustenfeld's *Yakût*, II, 933; III, 396. In the Arab geographers the name is found spelt *صغر*, Sughar; *زغر*, Zughar; and *سقر*, Sukar.

⁵ *Op. cit.*, II, 934.

⁶ "*Meracid-el-Ittilâ*," I, 514.

dreary road from the east to catch one's first sight of Jerusalem from the summit of the Mount of Olives. Arriving by the Jaffa road, the Holy City is hidden until you are almost within its gates, but from Bethany the pilgrim rides suddenly into view of this unique metropolis, which, in its entirety, lies spread out at his feet. The week's discomfort in Bedouin tents, and the monotonous ride of the last few hours, had, I think, attuned us all to a just pitch of appreciation, and although rather too hungry and weary for æsthetic raptures, it was some little time before we turned down through St. Stephen's Gate, and sought out our night quarters in the Damascus Hotel.

In concluding these notes, and for the information of those who may have any intention of penetrating into the countries beyond the Jordan, I may be permitted to remind my readers that our journey had been accomplished without paying a piastre to Goblân, the famous (or rather infamous) chief of the 'Adwân, or even in any way gratifying the cupidity of the Sheikh of Sûf—both worthies generally but too well known to those who have left Jerusalem for a trip into the Land of Gilead. And yet we had been able, in the course of six days, to visit the sites of Tabakat Fahl (Pella), Jerâsh, 'Ammân, and 'Arâk el Emir, taking the direct route across country from one site to another, and along roads seldom seen by the ordinary tourist. The secret of our successful raid—for so only can I venture to call it—lay in the fact that, taking neither tents nor servants, we were but three horsemen mounted on inelegant hacks, more useful as roadsters than in any way remarkable for breed, and that one of us was a native of the country, personally acquainted with the Arab sheikhs of the district which it was intended to visit. Lastly, as we took no more baggage than our horses could carry, we, in accordance with that ancient and convenient custom of the Arabs, imposed ourselves nightly as guests in some nomad camp, coming down at the hair-tent of the sheikh, whose honour, forthwith, was engaged for our personal well-being and safety. By this proceeding we avoided the necessity of carrying with us provisions for the road, and dispensed with a baggage animal: and hence our appearance was in no way calculated to excite the cupidity of those whom we met in our journey.

The presence of tents and baggage mules, with the attendant dragoman and zaptieh, are plentiful reasons to explain the costliness of which travellers complain who cross the Jordan and go eastward from the Dead Sea. Any one who is lucky enough to get a native friend for companion, who can keep his own counsel, and wants no escort of zaptiehs, can almost always visit any part of the country beyond the Jordan at very little risk. Only his stay must be so little protracted that the authorities get no news of it, and for this short time the traveller must be content with the nourishment of Arab fare, and such repose as is to be obtained on the hard earth under an Arab tent, where hospitality is alike provided for vermin and for men.

46, CHARLES STREET, MAYFAIR,
LONDON, *May*, 1885.