

NOTES AND QUERIES.

1. *The Site of Zoar*.—(1) In biblical topography to ignore the text and to rely on Josephus or on plausible assertion or specious speculation, is to invite disaster. The Bible, as Dr. Grove pointed out, places the cities of the plain at the north end of the Dead Sea; tradition, sprung from Josephus, at the south end. The Bible states that Lot's wife became a pillar of salt. Josephus, having heard of one fantastic column of dissolving rock-salt at the south-west border of the sea, believed that it was the veritable salt relic; and wrote: "I have seen (examined) it and it remains to this day." He further located Zoar (*Wars*, iv, VIII, 4), which, Lot pleaded, was near Sodom, at the south end of the sea, and added (*Ant.* i, VIII, 3) "the river Jordan not far from Sodom," although the river is 50 miles from the south end. Misled by this careless writer, Eusebius and Jerome (the authors of our Pseudo-Zion and Pseudo-Holy Sepulchre) and the majority (according to Dr. Driver) of recent authorities have to this day been satisfied with the southern site.

Prof. Cheyne, rejecting both northern and southern sites, wonders "at the confidence with which all writers dogmatically decide in favour of one or the other site," at the same time soothing the southerners with Clermont-Ganneau's *dictum*, "Jebel Usdum is the uncontested representative of Sodom," and cheering me with the admission of being "correct in requiring (*Quarterly Statement*, 1898, p. 110) the description in Deut. xxxiv to be taken literally, and the hinder sea to be the Dead Sea."

Prof. Driver writes (*Hasting's Dict.*, Zoar): "And, in fact, there are biblical *data*, which, when carefully considered, appear to support the southern site. To say nothing of Deut. xxxiv, 3, just referred to, it is observable that Zoar is always spoken of as a Moabite town, and never claimed as an Israelite or (Josh. xiii, 15-21) Reubenite town, as it naturally would be if it lay at the north end of the sea."

"Beware of deceit when thou hearest the name" of Moab, for fraud ever flickers around the term *Moabite*. From Jerusalem came Moabite pottery, then Moabite MSS., both gross forgeries exposed by Prof. Ganneau; from Rabbath Ammon burst the specious claim.

for the peaceable restoration of the *plains* of Moab (near Jordan) and the *land* of Moab (the Mishor of Reuben), as unjustly held by Israel: Jephthah well combated the monstrous demand by word and deed. Now, at last, comes the proposition that the southern site is supported by Zoar "being always spoken of as a Moabite town and never claimed as an Israelite town," etc. Offhand in 1879 (*Quarterly Statement*, p. 15) I treated Zoar, as placed in Is. xv, and Jerem. xviii, in the northern position, never dreaming that in 1902 these chapters would be used to support the southern site. Now the *site* of Zoar is the crucial question before us. Gibraltar is British, but not in Britain, so at times Zoar may have been *under* Moab but never *in* Moab, whose northern boundary was the Arnon (Numb. xxi, 13), after Sihon's conquest.

The word Zoar occurs once in each of the above chapters which treat of Moab, and precisely mention its two great cities "Ar of Moab" and "Kir of Moab"—together with at least 12 cities (*e.g.*, Heshbon, Elealeh, Dibon, etc.) distinctly classed as Israelite (Reuben's or Gad's) in Numb. xxxii and Josh. xiii. Are these 12 also Moabite cities, simply because they are named in the same chapters which condemn Zoar to be Moabite through naming it? They all were doubtless at times *under* Moab, but while possession may change, position cannot shift a hair's breadth. Jeremiah asks concerning the Ammonites (xlix, 1), "Why then doth Malcam possess Gad, and his people dwell in the cities thereof?" Similarly Moab possessed Reuben. But if Gad's cities did not become Ammonite, why must Reuben's become Moabite? Why must Zoar? Surely not that it may be argued that Zoar was Moabite, therefore it was in Moab: that Moab was towards the south end of the Dead Sea; that therefore Zoar was towards its south end, and could not possibly be at the north end, the position required in Gen. and Deut.! If (catching at a straw) southerners still reply: The 12 cities are named in Israel's Doomsday-book, but Zoar is not; then the answer is, that book does not give an exhaustive list of cities and villages in Israel. Bethlehem (with Tekoa) is not named therein in Judah's list, but Bethlehem nevertheless then existed. The omission of Zoar proves nothing at all, except that it was what its name means, *little*, too insignificant for record.

(2) It is urged that Ezekiel describes Sodom as being on the right (*i.e.*, the south) of Jerusalem. Prove this and the southern site is established by one text. The prophet writing (and picturing from

Chebar) says precisely (xvi, 46): "at *thy* left hand . . . at *thy* right hand." Is it asserted, as a fact, that Jewish usage invariably means by this expression *north* and *south*, and that the person addressed must look due east, so that here Ezekiel could not picture Jerusalem from the north-east, so as to have Samaria on her left hand, and the north end of the Dead Sea on her right? Also is Sodom to be taken literally? If so, how could her captivity return or be received? (See *Quarterly Statement*, 1898, p. 118.)

When it is said that Dan and other points are not visible from Pisgah, I reply: "certainly not, if you take a *wrong* Dan, a *wrong* Pisgah," etc. (see last reference).

(3) Dr. Driver observes that: "Kikkar does not mean *plain* but *round*, and it may thus have been applied to the entire basin in which both the lower Jordan and the Dead Sea lay." Then *round* would certainly be a most inappropriate name for a surface 80 miles long and 10 broad on an average. Obviously *kikkar* is applied to an oasis in the Jordan valley. From near Bethel Lot saw the celebrated one—that all of it was well-watered—*i.e.*, the oasis to the south, as thou comest unto Zoar. There was another, out of his sight, named in 1 Kings vii, 46: "the plain (or oasis) of Jordan . . . between Succoth and Zarthan." "All" in Gen. xiii, 10, does not seem to me an exaggeration. Dr. Driver suggests that *the plain of the Jordan*, v, 10, 11, is different from *the plain* in v, 12. Why so? Is the valley of Jezreel in Judg. vi, 33, different from *the valley* in vii, 1, 8?

(4) It is said that in Deut. xxxiv. 3, "unto Zoar" implies naturally some distance off, not a place at the foot of Nebo. In the triptyche each portion ends with *unto*. "The *negeb*, and the *kikkar* of the valley of Jericho, unto Zoar"—begins quite 50 miles off—reaches to the *kikkar* near Jericho. If it went back again to a southern Zoar, 40 miles off, the description would be as absurd as sending the four kings back from Engedi to a southern Sodom.

(5) Tell Shaghur. This I believe represents Zoar. The name, however, does not affect the north or south site. It is added "Shaghur is not distinguishable from Ras Siaghah." As Col. Conder speaks of it as *at our feet*, it was, I doubt not, within the field of vision.

Thus I fail to find even one sound argument in favour of the cities of the plain having been at the south end of the Dead Sea, or one sound objection to their position at the north end. Perhaps

some traveller at the end of January will visit Talat el Benât, and, weather permitting, himself view, as far as Dan, the panorama seen by Moses (*Quarterly Statement*, 1898, p. 118). (The remark "Zoar is associated with places in the northern part of Moab in Jeremiah and Isaiah" needs amendment, Moab being a variable term. *Read*, "in the northern part of ancient Moab, previous to Sihon's conquest.")

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2. *Ramet el-Khalil*.—During the past year I have twice visited and carefully examined this perplexing structure. The following are the principal conclusions to which I have come regarding it:—

(1) In view of the rudeness of all pre-Herodian architecture in Palestine (as revealed by excavation), it is *prima facie* unlikely that the structure should be of early date. Nor does the masonry resemble the stone-dressing of Egyptians or any other early civilised nation.

(2) The existence in the walls of lintel stones, threshold stones, fragments with inscriptions and fragments with mouldings, *out of place*, shows that the walls, as they are at present, were made from the materials of an earlier building.

(3) The mouldings, being rather debased Roman in character, indicate that the earlier building was not of high antiquity.

(4) Tradition speaks of a church of St. Helena as having been erected here. The tradition is at present crystallised round a small, amorphous ruin near the *Ramet*, commonly called Helena's church. This is too ruined to make out much about it, but it looks like anything rather than a church.

(5) The *Ramet* enclosure itself cannot justly be considered as either ruined or unfinished, for the level of the top of the wall is uniform over its whole length. Of all the classes of buildings in Palestine, it looks like nothing so much as the enclosing wall of a *khân*.

(6) The masonry seems to me to resemble (but to be superior to) that of Constantine's Basilica in the Russian Church east of the Holy Sepulchre.

(7) The destruction of a basilica and re-use of its stones could hardly take place before the Muhammadan conquest.

(8) The stones were used only so far as they were available, and no new stones were cut on the colossal scale of the re-used blocks. There is no visible reason to suppose that there are, or ever were, large stones of the same kind on the North and East sides of the enclosure. This observation (like all the rest) is subject to correction, when someone has the good fortune to be able to excavate here.

From these conclusions I deduce the following theory respecting the Ramet el-Khalil:—

The basilica of Constantine, mentioned by Eusebius, was not the insignificant building whose ruin is identified therewith, but a grandiose structure whose scale may be deduced from the immense blocks with which it was built. This basilica was destroyed in the early Muslim period, and its material re-used in the erection of a khan, probably on the same site, and probably for the accommodation of pilgrims to the holy places of Hebron. That khan is the structure now known as the Ramet el-Khalil.

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