

EGYPT AND PALESTINE.¹

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THE present attempt of the Turks, acting under the direction of the Germans, to march an army across the desert lying between Palestine and Egypt, and to force a passage over the Suez Canal, has naturally directed attention to the relationship between the two countries, and to the way in which their fortunes have been linked together from time immemorial. It is sometimes assumed that this desert forms a serious barrier between them, and it is forgotten that, although not an ideal country for travelling, it has never proved an obstacle to the advance of armies, and that there have been many cases in the past of successful invasions of Egypt from Palestine, and of Palestine from Egypt.

The desert that forms the natural boundary between Egypt and Palestine can be simply defined. On the north is the coast of the Mediterranean from Port Said to Rafah, a distance of 120 miles, and thence by a line from Rafah to the southern end of the Dead Sea, about seventy miles. The eastern boundary is a line of 110 miles by the Valley of the Arabah from the Dead Sea to the north point of the Gulf of Akabah; and the southern is the road running from Akabah through the fort of Nakhel to Suez, 150 miles in length. South of this road lies the Peninsula of Sinai, a mass of rugged mountains intersected by barren valleys, which form a continuation of the great desert. These three boundaries, the northern, the eastern, and the southern, have not altered within historic times, and are much the same now as when Moses led the Israelites to the Promised Land.

But, in this respect, the western boundary of the desert differs considerably from the others, as it has altered much within a com-

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paratively recent period, and the fact that it is now so clearly defined by the line of the Suez Canal, stretching from north to south across the isthmus for 100 miles, tends to obscure its history, and to conceal changes due to alterations both in the course of the Nile, and of the position of the northern end of the Gulf of Suez—alterations that have gradually taken place since the prehistoric times, when the waters of the Mediterranean reached the site of Cairo, and joined the Red Sea somewhere in the vicinity of the present town of Ismailia.

As the old writers said with truth, “the Delta of Egypt is the gift of the Nile,” and the mass of deposit brought down during long ages from the mountains of Abyssinia, has gradually driven back the waters of the Mediterranean, cut off that sea from the Gulf of Suez, and formed the country now known as the Delta or Lower Egypt. But, while the line of coast was pushed farther to the north, the waters of the Nile had still to reach the sea, and forced their way across the Delta through a number of branches, which have constantly changed. Of such branches there are only two at present, the Rosetta and Damietta; but, two thousand years ago, there were at least seven, of which five no longer exist. Of these five the most important were the western or Canopic mouth, which, passing to the extreme west of the Delta, reached the Mediterranean near Alexandria, and the Pelusiac mouth, which left the Nile near Memphis, and, taking a north-easterly direction at the foot of the mountains, joined the Mediterranean to the east of the ancient city of Pelusium, about twenty miles east of the line of the present Suez Canal.

The point where this branch crossed the line of the canal is doubtful, but it was probably somewhere between El Kantara and Lake Timsah, “the Lake of Crocodiles,” on which the town of Ismailia now stands. The closing of the Pelusiac branch has greatly altered the character of this part of the Delta, as the district through which it passed was formerly a fertile country, the Land of Goshen of the Bible, but is now, for the most part, a sandy desert.

The Red Sea also has greatly altered, as it extended much farther north than at present, and, as late as the sixth century A.D., was connected with the Bitter Lakes, of which the northern end is only fourteen miles from Ismailia, so that the original Suez Canal, cut by the Egyptian Pharaohs, was much shorter than the present canal, as it merely connected the Pelusiac branch of the Nile with

the Bitter Lakes, and thus provided water communication from the Mediterranean to the Gulf of Suez. Traces of the ancient canal were found by the French engineers between Lake Timsah and the Bitter Lakes, when excavating the channel of the Suez Canal.

In former times, therefore, the western boundary of the desert between Egypt and Palestine was defined, first by the Pelusiac branch of the Nile; then a short length of open country to the north end of the Bitter Lakes; and, on the south, by the prolongation of the Gulf of Suez up to these lakes. All the roads coming from the east met near the centre of this line, and then led westwards through the Land of Goshen, now called the Wady Tumilat, to Heliopolis and Memphis. Of these roads, the three principal were as follows: first, the northern road, called in the Bible the Way of the Philistines, which led along the coast of the Mediterranean from Gaza to Pelusium, and thence south-west by the Pelusiac arm of the Nile; second, the central road, or Way of Shur, which, starting from Beersheba in southern Palestine, crossed the desert in a nearly direct western line; and third, the south road, or Way of the Red Sea, from Akaba to Suez, and then along the prolongation of the Gulf of Suez to the Bitter Lakes, to the north of which it joined the other roads into the Delta. Of these roads the northern has always been the most generally used, as it was better supplied with water than the others.

Communication between Egypt and Palestine must have existed from a remote period, but the Pharaohs of the earlier dynasties do not appear to have attempted conquests in Asia, and were content with their Egyptian dominions, which they ruled from the capitals of Memphis and Thebes; nor, on the other hand, did the more ancient Asiatic monarchies invade Egypt with a view to its subjugation; but it is probable that emigrants from the east crossed the desert and settled in the Delta, then a newly formed and very fertile country, where they established communities more or less independent of the native rulers of Upper Egypt. Then, as time went on, the Asiatic settlers increased in numbers, until at length at some date—not yet fixed with certainty, but possibly about 2000 B.C.—they shook off the yoke of the Pharaohs, and established the first of the succession of Egyptian dynasties known in history as the Hyksos or Shepherd Kings, who ruled in the Delta for some centuries, and appear to have had their principal capital at San, or Tanis, the Zoan of the Bible, the remains of which are still to

be seen at the mounds of San el-Hagar, which lie about thirty miles west of El Kantara on the Suez Canal.

It was during the time of the Hyksos domination that the patriarch Abraham visited Egypt, that Joseph was purchased as a slave by the captain of the king's guard and rose to high position in the state, and that Jacob with his family and followers settled in the Land of Goshen, the district which, as has already been explained, lay along the Pelusiac branch of the Nile. It is quite in accord with the history of the period that the Pharaohs of the Delta should have been well disposed towards them, being Asiatics like themselves, and that, so long as the Hyksos ruled Egypt, the descendants of Jacob lived in peace and prosperity in the district which had been allotted to them during the viceroyalty of Joseph.

But, in process of time, another king, or rather dynasty of kings, arose, who knew not Joseph. After years of submission to the Asiatic settlers, the Egyptians rose in revolt against their rulers in the Delta, and about 1600 B.C. subdued the Hyksos, and, after a long struggle, re-established the native Egyptian monarchy. The capital of the new dynasty, known as the XVIIIth, was fixed at Thebes, and Tanis became a city of secondary importance. And not only did the Pharaohs of the XVIIIth dynasty overcome the rulers of the Delta, but they also followed up the conquest, and King Thothmes crossed the desert with a great army, and made Palestine for the first time a province of Egypt. An interesting light is thrown upon this period, when Palestine was a dependency of Egypt, by the collection of letters written in cuneiform, found at Tel el-Amarna in Upper Egypt, a number of which are from governors of towns in Palestine to the Egyptian kings.

Towards the end of the XVIIIth or beginning of the XIXth dynasty, Egyptian authority in Palestine dwindled away, and the latter country again came under Asiatic influence. At the same time the Egyptian kings began to treat the Asiatics in the Delta with greater severity, and, under Rameses II of the XIXth dynasty, the Israelites were reduced to the position of slaves, so that naturally their thoughts turned to their country of origin, and they were ready to leave Egypt as soon as a leader appeared capable of guiding them across the desert to the Land of Canaan.

This duty fell to Moses, who had served in the Egyptian army, and had commanded an expedition to the Sudan, where he had the advantage of gaining experience in the art of campaigning—

experience which must have been of great value to him when guiding an ill-disciplined and troublesome host through a nearly waterless desert. Gathering the Israelites together at the east end of the Land of Goshen, he brought them to the edge of the desert, and then, being pursued by an Egyptian army, turned south between the mountains and the Bitter Lakes, which at that time formed the north part of the Gulf of Suez. Crossing the Gulf at a point probably between what are known as the Great and Little Bitter Lakes, he followed the southern road, which has already been described, and then turned south-east to Mount Sinai. But it was "forty" years—that stately phrase with which the Eastern chronicler rounds off an uncertain point—before the people finally entered into Canaan, and during that period they remained in the desert, proving that there was a sufficient, if not a large, water supply.

At the commencement of the XXth dynasty the Asiatics once more attempted to conquer Egypt, and, in the reign of Rameses III, a large force appears to have marched from Palestine along the coast, supported by a fleet, probably Phoenician or Philistine, when a battle was fought near the entrance to the Pelusiatic branch of the Nile, in which the Egyptians were victorious, and defeated the invaders, following them up into Syria. But, on this occasion, the Egyptians do not appear to have attempted to bring Palestine again under the domination of Egypt, and when the Israelites crossed the Jordan after their term in the desert, they found the country in the possession of the native Canaanites and the Philistine foreigners, who had come from oversea, possibly from the islands of the Aegean. Sea power had begun to make itself felt in the eastern Mediterranean, and it is probable that the Egyptian kings realised that it was not possible to keep a firm hold on Palestine so long as the sea was in the hands of a ship-owning people, a condition of affairs that holds good to the present day.

The succeeding years brought troublous times to Egypt, and the kings who succeeded Rameses III gradually lost power. The last of his dynasty appears to have fled to the Sudan, and Thebes ceased to be the capital of Egypt, its place being taken by Tanis in the Delta, which again became a city of importance. From that time forward the Delta had the principal authority, while Upper Egypt was reduced to the position of a province, and, as a natural result, relations with Asia became more intimate.

Sheshenk of the XXIInd dynasty, the Shishak of the Bible, was the next Pharaoh to invade Palestine, and, according to Josephus, he led across the desert an army composed of 60,000 cavalry and 400,000 infantry with 1,200 war chariots, which may be regarded as the ancient representation of modern artillery. The numbers are orientally exaggerated; but it is clear that he had a large force, and that they had no difficulty in passing the desert. Rehoboam was then king of Judah, and appears to have been quite incapable of making a stand against the Egyptians, as the cities of southern Palestine fell without fighting, and Jerusalem was only saved by the surrender of all the treasures of the royal palace and temple. There is an interesting record of this expedition on the south wall of the great hall at Karnak, where the names of 150 cities captured by Shishak are included in a hieroglyphic account of the campaign.

The next invasion of Palestine was less successful when Osorkon (Zerah) crossed the desert with a large army, and was completely defeated by Asa, king of Judah, at Mareshah, a place about twenty miles inland from Ascalon. The defeat had a decisive effect, as no further attempt to invade Palestine from Egypt appears to have been made for about two hundred years.

During that period the power of the Assyrian monarchy on the Euphrates had steadily increased, the Assyrian armies marched into Syria, and the kingdom of Israel and Judah became tributary states. Then the people of Palestine asked the Egyptians to come to their assistance, and for many years (from about 740 B.C. to 670 B.C.) there was war between Assyria and Egypt, during which the armies of both nations crossed and recrossed the desert, and fought in many battles with varying success, until in 670 B.C. Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, invaded Egypt and captured the city of Memphis, while Tirhakah, king of Egypt, fled to the south. Then Egypt became an Assyrian province. But the Assyrian rule was short-lived, as, a few years later, Psammetichus, the governor of Sais, rose in revolt and drove the Assyrians out of Egypt, following them up into Palestine; his son, Necho, continued the war, and, at the battle of Megiddo, defeated and killed Josiah, king of Judah, who had taken up arms for his Assyrian suzerain. Then Necho advanced north, and was defeated at Carchemish on the Euphrates, when the Egyptians had to retreat to their own country, and Palestine fell again under the domination of Babylon.

In 528 B.C. Babylon was captured by Cyrus, and the Assyrian monarchy came to an end, all its possessions being annexed by Persia. Cambyses, the son and successor of Cyrus, decided to invade Egypt and assembled an army in southern Palestine for that purpose, making arrangements for crossing the desert, of which Herodotus gives an interesting description, as it shows that then, as at the present time, the provision of a water supply was the main difficulty. Herodotus says that there was three days' journey across the desert without a drop of water, and that Cambyses made a treaty with the Arabian king, or, as we would call him, the head sheikh of the Bedouin, to furnish a supply. Then the historian goes on to relate that the Arabian contrived as follows:

“He filled a number of camels' skins with water, and loading therewith all the live camels that he possessed, drove them into the desert, and awaited the coming of the army. This is the more likely of the two tales that are told. The other is an improbable story, but, as it is related, I think that I ought not to pass it by. There is a great river in Arabia, called the Corys, which empties itself into the Erythraean Sea. The Arabian king, they say, made a pipe of the skins of oxen and other beasts, reaching from this river all the way to the desert, and so brought the water to certain cisterns, which he had dug in the desert to receive it. It is a twelve days' journey from the river to this desert tract. And the water, they say, was brought through three different pipes to three separate places.”

Herodotus also describes the arrangement made by Cambyses for keeping up a permanent water supply in the desert, for the convenience of troops and others passing through, in these words:—

“I shall now mention a thing of which few of those who sail to Egypt are aware. Twice a year wine is brought into Egypt from every part of Greece, as well as from Phoenicia, in earthen jars; and yet in the whole country you will nowhere see, as I may say, a single jar. What then, everyone will ask, becomes of the jars? This, too, I will clear up. The governor of each town has to collect all the wine jars within his district, and to carry them to Memphis, where they are all filled with water by the Memphians, who then convey them to this desert track of Syria. And so it comes to

pass that all the jars which enter Egypt year by year, and are then put up for sale, find their way into Syria, whither all the old jars have gone before them. This way of keeping the passage into Egypt fit for use by storing water there, was begun by the Persians so soon as they became masters of that country."

It is probable that a similar arrangement has been provided by the Turkish Army now attempting the invasion of Egypt, except that the place of the wine jars would be taken by sheet-iron vessels.

After crossing the desert, Cambyses defeated the Egyptian Army in a great battle near Pelusium, and laid siege to Memphis, which surrendered. Then the whole of Egypt was subdued and became a province of Persia for more than a century, when the people revolted and re-established a native dynasty; some years later Artaxerxes Ochus, king of Persia, re-conquered it, and since then, Egypt has never been under native rulers.

Just as the Assyrian monarchy had fallen before Cyrus the Persian, so the Persian fell before Alexander the Macedonian, who made himself master of the near East, marched through Syria and Palestine to Egypt, and founded the city of Alexandria as the new capital. When, after his death, the Macedonian Empire was divided, Ptolemy, the son of Lagos, made himself king of Egypt, while Antigonos took Syria and the adjoining countries, and, for many years, Palestine was the battlefield between Syria and Egypt, until the reign of King Antiochus the Great, who captured it for Syria. An attempt on the part of one of his successors to invade Egypt was stopped by the Roman Senate, and, from that time forward, the latter country came under the power of Rome, while Palestine also was made a Roman province some years later.

The next invasion of Egypt from the east was in A.D. 268, when Zenobia, Queen of Palmyra, brought a large army across the desert and defeated the Roman garrison in the Delta, which she held for a few years until her city of Palmyra was captured by the Emperor Aurelian, and she was made prisoner by the Romans.

Then for some years both Egypt and Palestine remained as provinces, first of the western Empire with its capital at Rome, and then of the eastern, with the capital at Constantinople, until A.D. 620, when Chosroes, king of Persia, invaded Syria, captured Damascus and Jerusalem, and, crossing the desert, took possession

of Egypt, which again became a Persian province for ten years, after which the Emperor Heraclius defeated Chosroes, and Egypt and Palestine came under the power of Constantinople. But a few years later they again changed masters and were conquered by the followers of Mohammed from Arabia, when both countries became a part of the dominions of the Khalifs, and were ruled by governors appointed from Bagdad. One of these governors of Egypt, in A.D. 868, Ahmed ibn Tulun, revolted, and, having made himself independent, captured Palestine and Syria, and established a dynasty which lasted about forty years, when the Khalif Moktafi sent an army and reconquered Egypt.

In A.D. 969, el-Moizz, the first of the Fatimite Khalifs, subdued Egypt and Palestine, and it was a governor appointed from Egypt who was in command at Jerusalem when it was captured by Godfrey de Bouillon and the Crusaders in A.D. 1099. Then Palestine was separated from Egypt and became part of the Christian kingdom of Jerusalem, until Salah ed-Din, better known as Saladin, made himself Sultan of Egypt, and took possession of Syria and Palestine, defeating the Christians in A.D. 1187, and leaving to them only a narrow fringe of territory along the coast, from which they were finally expelled in A.D. 1291 by el-Ashraf Khalil, another Sultan of Egypt.

Then Palestine remained a dependency of Egypt until A.D. 1516, when the Turkish Sultan, Selim I, extended the Ottoman Empire to the south, defeated and killed Sultan Kansuh el-Ghury at the battle of Marg Dabik near Aleppo and advanced into Egypt. Then Egypt, Syria, and Palestine became provinces of the Ottoman Empire, and have so remained for four centuries.

During that period there have been two noteworthy crossings of the desert. The first in 1798, when Napoleon, after subduing Egypt, led an army of 14,000 men, cavalry, artillery, and infantry, into Palestine, but was compelled to retreat in consequence of the support given by the British fleet to the garrison of Acre; the second in 1831, when Mohamed Ali, the Turkish governor of Egypt, declared his independence of Constantinople, and sent a force under his son Ibrahim to take possession of Palestine and Syria. The Turks were defeated, but the western Powers of Europe intervened, and compelled Mohamed Ali to acknowledge the Sultan as his master, when Palestine was once more separated from Egypt and was placed under a governor sent from Constantinople.

The history of the past proves two facts clearly :—

1. That the desert separating Egypt from Palestine has never been a serious obstacle to a properly equipped and well-led army advancing in either direction.

2. That from the earliest times, with the exception of some comparatively short intervals, Palestine has been a dependency of Egypt, or else Egypt and Palestine have both been provinces of the same empire, whether that empire was Assyrian, Persian, Greek, Roman, Arab, or Turkish.

It is interesting to consider how the lessons to be learned from history can be applied to the condition of affairs at present, when the Ottoman Empire shows signs of breaking up and the future disposition of its component parts may have to be settled.

As regards the invasion of Egypt from Palestine, it is probable that the danger is not great, because, so far as it is possible to judge from the small amount of information allowed to be published, the Turkish army of attack appears to be neither well organised nor well led, and the Bedouin of the desert, although very accessible to bribery, and always prepared to join the winning side, have no great love for the Turks, and would doubtless be prepared to throw in their lot with Egypt if they thought it was for their advantage. It is reasonable also to assume that the Anglo-Egyptian garrison is quite capable of saving Egypt from invasion.

But a question which may have to be settled before long is a serious one. What is to be the future of Palestine? Some people suggest the establishment of a Jewish power, and others that it should become a dependency of one of the western States of Europe. As regards the former I have not seen it stated whether it is proposed to set up a Jewish kingdom or a Jewish republic, nor how the king or president would be selected. It is a little difficult to get figures of any great accuracy, but there appears to be no question that the bulk of the inhabitants of Palestine are Mohammedan, while, of the remainder, the majority are Christians of one denomination or another, and the minority are Jews, except in certain places such as Jerusalem. Is it reasonable to suppose that the Mohammedans and the Christians would submit to be governed by Jews? It must be remembered too that the Jews, notwithstanding their admirable qualities, have, with rare exceptions such as Moses and David, never shown much capacity for government, and to expect them suddenly to develop such capacity is a vain dream.

It is probable, judging from the history of the past, that if an attempt were made to set up a Jewish government in Palestine, there would be a revolt in a short time, and the Jewish rulers would be expelled unless supported by the armed force of some foreign power.

Then as regards the possibility of some European State taking over Palestine as a dependency or colony, it is difficult to see what Power could do it with the consent of the other Powers. There can be no doubt that for some years past the German Government has decided that Palestine was to be annexed by Germany, and the German buildings, erected within the last few years in Jerusalem, though ostensibly built for religious and charitable purposes, have evidently been designed for military use also; the sanatorium on the Mount of Olives, the great hospice of St. Paul at the Damascus Gate, and the convent of St. Mary on Mount Sion, all occupy important strategical positions for maintaining a hold upon the city. But, unless Germany succeeded in defeating England, France, and Russia in the present war, those Powers would certainly not consent to a German occupation of Palestine, and such an occupation would be very distasteful to the inhabitants, who dislike the Germans and German methods.

Again it would appear undesirable that either France or Russia should take possession of Palestine on account of the hostility between the Greek and Latin churches, which has lasted for at least thirteen centuries. It is perhaps sad to acknowledge it, but there can be no question that it is the fact that a Mohammedan Power rules in Palestine which alone keeps the followers of the two Churches more or less at peace with one another.

Of the western Powers the one that would have most chance of maintaining order in Palestine would be England, and, if a poll of the inhabitants could be taken, there can be little doubt that England would get the largest number of votes; but there is probably nothing that a British Government would like less than to take the place of Turkey, and to add Palestine to the British Empire.

The solution of the question which would appear most likely to be attended with success might be to take a lesson from history and to make Palestine once more a province of Egypt. After a lapse of four centuries the Sultanate of Egypt has been restored under what appear to be exceptionally favourable conditions, and, as Palestine

belonged to Egypt at the time of the Turkish conquest in A.D. 1516, it would be reasonable that it should again belong to Egypt on the restoration of the Sultanate. It must not be forgotten that the inhabitants of Palestine look with envy on the treatment which the Egyptians have received during the last thirty-three years, and are perfectly aware that the latter are ruled with justice and taxed with fairness. As Egypt is Mohammedan there would be no religious difficulty, while Christians and Jews would, as in Egypt, be treated with due consideration.

If this desirable conclusion could be arrived at and Palestine again annexed to Egypt, it would be necessary to improve the communication between the two countries, and this could easily be done by the construction of a railway from Port Said to Gaza, and thence north to join the Jaffa-Jerusalem and the Haifa-Jordan railways. It is easy to understand that, while Palestine was directly under Turkey, there were objections to the construction of such a railway; but if the two countries are joined as proposed, these objections would disappear, and the advantage to Palestine of having an excellent harbour, like Port Said, would be very great, as, at present, there is no good port between Port Said and Beyrout. Efforts are being made at present to improve the roadstead at Haifa, and for years the construction of a safe port at Jaffa has been under consideration; but neither of these places could be made, even with a large expenditure of money, as satisfactory as Port Said, while the railway from it would have an excellent effect on the development of Palestine if the latter country had the advantage of a good system of government such as Egypt is fortunate to possess at the present time, and the fact that Egypt is under the protection of England, and can depend on British sea power, would ensure the coast of Palestine from any attempt to interfere with it.
