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NOTES ON A CROSS JORDAN TRIP MADE OCTOBER  
23<sup>RD</sup> TO NOVEMBER 7<sup>TH</sup>, 1899.

By the Rev. JAMES B. NIES, Ph.D.

STARTING from Haifa with the Rev. M. Linton Smith, Mr. Robert Hensman, and two mukâris as companions we reached Beisan at the end of the first day. We passed the night at the railroad house, and early next morning, provided by the Mudir of Beisan with a soldier and a letter to the Sheikh of Umm Keis, we rode toward the Yarmuk *viâ* the Jisr el-Mujamia, and reached the hot springs el-Hammeh about noon. A pariah dog who had attached himself to our party, on seeing the crystalline pool, plunged in before we could prevent him. The rapidity with which he emerged from the bath was laughable. He evidently did not enjoy ablutions at 119° Fahr. In spite of this warning, however, we followed his example, and found that, with a little care, we could endure the heat. After luncheon and an inspection of the ruins, which are those of an important bathing establishment of Roman times, we ascended the steep mountain to the south. We arrived at Umm Keis about one hour after leaving the baths. On the way up we had several charming views of the Lake of Galilee, at one point being able to see its whole extent.

As the purpose of this paper is to call attention to a few things which seem to have been overlooked by former travellers, I will not detain the reader with any description of this place, and will only say that the evil appearance of its people caused us to be glad that we had both a soldier and a letter from the Mudir. We were given rice, milk, and some bedding, and, after passing several hours in the vermin-infested den which is called the guest house, we had breakfast and were ready to start at 3 a.m.

As our soldier had taken no barley for his horse, we were delayed by his attempt to awaken the Sheikh. At 3.30 we were on our way to Pella, descending into the Wady el-Arab, and then took our course along the Jordan Valley, which we reached in two hours—two dark and dismal hours, during which we walked, leading our horses through fields and over many rough places.

Nothing could exceed the delightful coolness of the Jordan Valley at the dawn of this day, but these pleasant impressions were soon to be dissipated, for as the sun rose higher and higher the heat eventually became so oppressive that we hailed with uncommon pleasure the turn toward the east, which was to bring us to Fahil or Pella. A view of the ruins, a bath in the delicious waters of the Jirm el-Moz, luncheon, and we were again on our way, for it was our purpose, if possible, to reach Ajlun that day. As the Jordan Valley was intolerably hot, we asked our soldier whether he knew a road over the mountain by which we could reach our destination. He answered, "Yes," and we determined to take that instead of the one recommended by Dr. Schumacher, who had kindly given us the benefit of his experience in the East Jordan country.

We first proceeded westward from the springs at Pella along the Jirm el-Moz about a quarter of a mile. Then we rounded the hill along the side of which we were riding, and, proceeding in a south-east direction, entered a valley from which we could not see Fahil. In a few minutes we came upon a number of rock-hewn tombs, some with stone doors still in place. I am thus particular in order that future explorers may not miss the way which will undoubtedly lead them to the old Roman road from Pella to Jerash. We soon found undoubted proofs of this road. Within the next two hours we passed no less than six Roman milestones, together with considerable patches of ancient pavement. Merrill speaks of this road, but he does not mention having seen the milestones. Guy le Strange was unable to find it, because he went up the wrong Wady. We first travelled north-east then east. Halaweh lay on our right at some distance, and we passed through Ba'âun, reaching Ajlun at 6 p.m., having been  $14\frac{1}{2}$  hours under way from Umm Keis.

Next day, October 26th, we made a hasty trip to Kul'at Rabadh, which lies to the west of Ajlun, overlooking the valley. We had hardly left the town when a drenching rain overtook us, and caused us to lose all hope of seeing the sun rise from this commanding point. We pressed on, however, in the hope of finding something at the castle which would repay us, and we were not disappointed in this. Like Kaukab el-Hawa and the castle at Salt, this impressive ruin deserves a much more careful examination than it has yet received. We found sculptured on

one of its arches the figures of fighting cocks, and a little beyond this other ornamentation never seen on Arab buildings. In addition to this, the outer face of the rock-hewn moat is greatly weather worn, differing in this respect from the sharp, clean cut stonework of the castle. The moat is undoubtedly much older than the castle.

We left Ajlun at 10 under the guidance of one of our mukâris, Mohamed Silwani, who had been over the road before, as we had dismissed the soldier. We were bound for Jerash, and took the road through 'Ain Jenneh. In about an hour and a half we came upon three Roman milestones, two of which were inscribed, but we did not stop to copy them, as this is a frequented road, and we felt certain it had already been done. An hour later we passed through Suf, and, following the valley, we reached Jerash in another hour. The rest of this day and the morning of the following were consumed in looking over the ruins. I would like to call attention to the tier of seats on the right hand near the stage as one faces the auditorium of the large theatre. The seats are all numbered with Greek letters, and a complete copy should be made.

On the afternoon of the 27th we rode along the crest of the mountain in full view of the Jabbok, to pay a visit to Reimun, and settle for ourselves the possibility of finding there the site of Ramoth Gilead. We inquired and examined carefully, but found all the usual signs of the site of a great city, such as ruins, tombs, and pottery, wanting.

Early next morning we took the road over the Jabbok for Salt, where we were hospitably entertained by the Rev. Mr. Wilson, of the C.M.S. On the 30th we set out for Amman, intending to see Yajuz on the way, and in four hours, at 10.40 a.m., reached that place. In the Arab cemetery, under the huge and ancient terebinth trees, we found not only interesting Roman ruins, but modern cromlechs and dolmens, together with altar stones for sacrifices. One of these contained five cup holes connected by channels for the flow of blood. One of the terebinths I measured, and afterwards found that Selah Merrill, in 1875, had measured the same tree. Merrill found it to measure, at a height of 4 feet above the ground, 16 feet 6 inches. My measure at the same place was 16 feet 9 inches. It has thus increased its circumference 3 inches in 25 years. If such measurements may

safely be used for chronological purposes, we could venture to say, without any other evidence, that this place was a ruin in the tenth century, for the tree we both measured has a large hewn block belonging to ruins incorporated in its trunk.

Leaving Yajuz, we took a southerly direction, and in 20 minutes came upon five pieces of Roman milestones with inscriptions. As three of these were in a field some 60 feet from the road partially buried and used as boundary stones by the native farmers, we felt certain they had not been copied. Two of these needed excavation, so that we obtained only one good copy, made by the Rev. M. Linton Smith. I called the attention of the Dominicans to these stones last year, and hope by this time they have been copied.

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 AVRELIVS TONINVS  
 PIVS PECI HICVSA  
 BRITANNICONTIF  
 MAX TRIB AP  
  
 COS III T  
 OF FVRNI

The copies we obtained of the other two in the field were not satisfactory. One of them seems to contain a place-name and may lead to the identification of the Roman name of Yajuz.

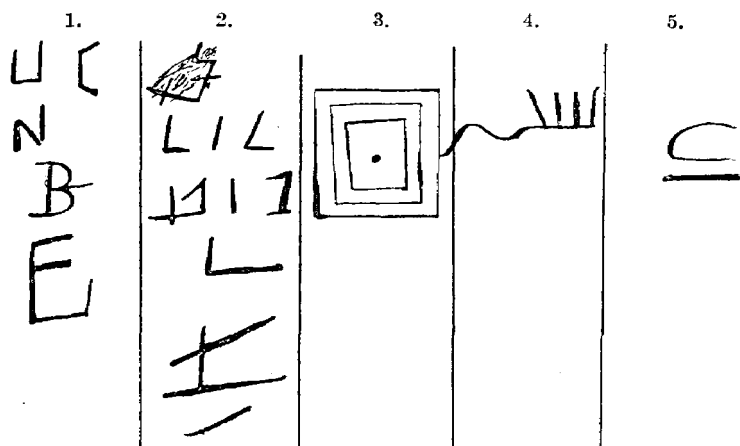
We reached Amman at 2 p.m., and proceeded at once to inspect the citadel and other ruins. In the evening we arranged with an Arab Christian of Fuhes, named Salim Suleiman, for the trip to Medaba *via* Mashita. He proved an excellent guide, thoroughly familiar with the country, perfectly honest, and on good terms with the Beni Sakr Arabs.

On October 28th, at 5.30 a.m., we left Amman for Mashita, riding in a southerly direction. At 6.45 we passed a large underground, rock-hewn cavern, with a number of kokim large enough to accommodate sarcophagi. At 7 o'clock we passed Umm el-Kheran. Our guide here told us he knew of a fine ruin four hours to the east, named Wukka. Seven minutes later, on a hill to the right, is a town, the name of which was given to us as Abasiyeh. We were now going S. by E. Here Salim told us of a place named Juadie,<sup>1</sup> where there is a long Hebrew inscription.

<sup>1</sup> Possibly the *el-Yadudeh* of the Palestine Exploration Fund map.

We unfortunately failed to ask him how he knew the characters to be Hebrew, as he had told us no travellers had yet visited the place. At 7.30 our road led us past Kasr es-Sabel, قصر الصجل. At 8 o'clock we rode into a village of Beni Sakr Arabs. Our guide had a talk with the Sheikh Suelmi, and borrowed from him a rifle. He was a small, thin individual, with parched skin and black, bead-like eyes. Uninvited he accompanied us on a very lean mare, which he rode bareback, wearing a single spur attached to one of his naked heels. We had reason to feel thankful for his company, as he and Salim varied the monotony of this part of our journey by an Arab tournament, and by chasing the frequent herds of gazelle. Within two hours we must have seen 200 of these graceful animals, in bunches varying from 10 to 40. Our Arabs had an exciting time, though they did not capture a single prize.

At 8.18 o'clock we passed Kh. Luban on the right, and at 10 the Hajj road, a few minutes later coming to a sudden drop in the plain. Below us in the desert to the south, at a distance of 15 or 20 minutes, lay the ruins of Mashita. Before descending, our guide pointed toward the east, along the elevation on which we were standing, to a small hill. He called it "a Tell," and said that it contained a number of large caves. We determined to see them, and in 15 minutes reached the place, which we found deserted, but with the ruins of former rude dwellings on top. Around the sides were a number of large caves which seemed for the most part natural, though the limestone here is very friable and may have corroded. These caves had been turned into sheepfolds by building round their mouths low, dry walls of stone, many of the blocks of which were hewn and evidently brought from neighbouring ruins. Upon some of these I found the following graffiti:—



No. 3 seems to be a game; 4 and 5 I thought wasm, but both the Sheikh and the guide assured me they are not, and, as they had no hesitancy in telling me later the various tribes to which the many wasm at Mashita belong, I have no doubt they meant what they said. They thought them ancient words or letters. As there has thus far been found absolutely no evidence regarding the mysterious ruin of the desert, I give them in the hope that they may lead to some clue, though I confess I am able to make nothing out of any of them.

As we stood on the summit of the "Tell" and looked toward the ruins in the plain I remarked to the Sheikh: "Hunak Mashita" ("Yonder is Mashita"). He answered at once: "La, la, hunak mush Mashita, hunak Khan. Hatha Tell Mashita" ("No, no, yonder is not Mashita, yonder is the Khan. This is Tell Mashita"). I then inquired closely from both the Sheikh and the guide whether this distinction is always made by the Arabs, and was answered in the affirmative.

May we not venture to hope that this gives us a clue to the origin of those puzzling ruins? Especially when we take into consideration that, in addition to the caves, there is at least one very large rock-hewn cistern in "Tell Mashita." This hill, full of large caves and cisterns, is close to the Hajj road. It derived its name from the fact that it afforded shelter not only to the Arabs but to the Mecca pilgrims. It was probably at one time a station of the Hajj. Its cistern (the one I saw) is large enough

to supply all the water needed by the pilgrims, and Amman is near enough to have supplied other necessities. What more natural, therefore, than that this place should be selected by one of the Omeiyad or 'Abbaside Khalifs for a magnificent khan to accommodate the Hajj? We know it was considered a pious duty by the early Khalifs to accompany the annual pilgrim caravan, and that some of these did much to alleviate the sufferings of the pilgrims.

Leaving the Tell we rode rather rapidly toward the ruins, as I recollect it, in a S.E. by S. direction, and entered the building from the north side. The place has been so thoroughly described by Tristram, who supposes it to be a palace built by Chosroes II, and by Selah Merrill, who claims it is a Byzantine monastery or church, that practically nothing remains to be said of its architecture and wonderful carvings. More recently a writer in "Harper's Magazine" fancifully ascribes it to the love of Ferhad and Shirin. If, after such masterly discussion, I may venture a suggestion or two which seems to favour a different view, I wish first to say that the basket capitals, the arches, and the carvings seem to be in favour of Byzantine or Persian work, and this would be not only possible but probable, if the place was constructed by the order of one of the early Khalifs; for it is well known that these depended on Greek and Persian artists. The 20 towers of the ruin seemed to me merely ornamental, and there is nothing to show that the place was intended for a fortress. Neither is there anything to show that it was intended as a monastery. Its ornate and costly architecture precludes the theory that it was erected as a mere hunting lodge. On the other hand its great courtyard, its cisterns, and, above all, its vicinity to the Hajj road seem to favour the explanation of the Beni Sakr Sheikh, that it was built for a khan but never finished, possibly because of the death of the Khalif who had conceived it.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Nies' notice of Tell Mashita is of much interest, and increases the probability that the celebrated ruins are those of a khân, which I have elsewhere ascribed to the celebrated Seljûk Sultan Meik Shah.—C.W.W.