

## JOURNEY INTO MOAB,

*Made in April, 1877, in company with BARON VON MÜNCHHAUSEN, the Imperial Germanic Consul.*

By C. SCHICK, Architect in Jerusalem.

*April 13th.*—The so-called Ghör, a wide, low-lying plain through which the Jordan flows, has a gradual but imperceptible rise of 300 feet by barometrical measurement from the river to the foot of the eastern mountains. The winter torrents proceeding from the hills have ploughed beds for themselves through the plain; these beds are on an average 10 feet deep and are full of boulders. The fruitful country round Jericho, and other well-watered places, lie on the western side of the valley, while on the eastern ridge oasis-like stretches of land are to be found, but they are more limited in extent than those on the western side, and each is marked by an artificial hill lying from north to south, Nimrin, Keferrein, Rameh; they correspond with the "acacia valley," of the Old Testament (Numbers xxxiii. 49).

The tents were pitched at Rameh for the night. The old town was situated on a plateau between the Wady Hesban and one of the conduits for water that proceeded from it. The walls of the diminutive castle are built of blocks of stone of about 3 feet in length by 1 foot to  $1\frac{1}{2}$  feet wide and  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a foot thick. There are numerous vaults in the neighbourhood, which are now used by the Bedouins as granaries, and also a large cromlech which they regard as a holy place. The ground is covered to a considerable extent with fragments of hewn stones and with potsherds. About a quarter of an hour's walk towards the north of this, on a spur of the ridge of mountains, is another group of ruins called Kal'at er-Rameh, and a third, of which the name is unknown, lies towards the east, beyond the northern side of the narrow glen called Wady Hesban. The position of the place reminds one forcibly of Baniyas at the source of the Jordan; it is healthy, the soil is rich, and it appears to have been a considerable settlement in days of yore. It may possibly have been the site of the Roman Livias, named Betramta by the Syrians, whereas the Old Testament calls it Beth-Haran (Numbers xxxii. 36) or Beth-aram (Joshua xiii. 27); not only does the distance given in the Onomasticon, five miles south of Beth-Nimro (now Nimrin), confirm this hypothesis, but its present name even seems to show traces of the old one.

*April 14th.*—A steep ascent of 1,200 feet (or about 900 feet above the level of the Mediterranean) leads to a spur of the mountain, which may be regarded as the highest point of the east Jordanic range of mountains. Here, at the northern end of the Dead Sea, the compass showed that Jericho was nearly W. 10 N., Tell Rameh W. 26 N., Tell Keferrein N. 42 W.

A second height, about 1,950 feet above the level of the sea, is remarkable for ten or twelve pillars, apparently of a much later forma-

tion towards the top than at the base, some of them broken and standing on solid square pedestals.

From this point one can distinctly see Mount Neby, the Nebo of the Old Testament on the other side of the deep valley of "Wady 'Ayūn Musa," or "Spring of Moses." The road leading up to the summit passed by the first corn-fields, and here it was that we first met some natives east of the Jordan; they were Bedouin women, who were driving their asses laden with water, from the spring we have already mentioned, back to their tents, spinning wool as they went.

Another ascent, 2,680 feet above the level of the sea, brought us to the highest point, on which was a Bedouin encampment, and there we found ourselves on the edge of the extensive plateau. We had climbed the whole way from the Ghōr to this place through rocky gullies and over stony, red ochreish, and chalky ground impossible to cultivate. But from this point onwards not another rock and hardly a stone was visible; far and wide only good land was to be seen, with flat undulations and depressions, which formed the beginning of the Wady, but not until further down hill did they become real valleys.

The first place worthy of notice in this wide plain is the group of ruins called Akfair, in the midst of which stands a stone table, about 8 feet high and 10 feet broad, visible at a great distance.

After a journey of many hours' duration through this part of the plain we reached Ma'in (the ancient Baal Meon), a ruined town on its southern border, which is already well known from the descriptions of former travellers (De Sauley, 1863, and Tristram, 1872). It is situated on the top of one of the flat hills enclosing one of the flat valleys, and is visible at a great distance. The hill on which it is to be found is connected on its western side, by means of a saddle, with other hills, likewise possessing ruined houses and cisterns. The lowest storeys of these old houses are partially hewn out of the chalk rock that crops up here through the thin layer of soil. The greater number of the stone buildings and arches to be found in this place belong to the Roman period; one long red-coloured stone alone shows signs of ornamentation, and it was manifestly the upper step of a doorway. Besides this, the entrance to one of the vaults is noteworthy from the fact that the stone forming its threshold has three letters carved on it.

We fixed the points of the compass in this place; Hesban E. 5 S., el-'Al E. 25 S., Timed E. 50 S., Sarnatsch. Between these two last nothing could be determined with certainty. A number of Bedouin tents were pitched round the ruins, and on the following day we passed a gipsy encampment at a short distance from this place.

*April 15th.*—The undulations are more marked to the south of Ma'in, and at a further descent of about 550 feet they become valleys. After a short ascent from this point in a westerly direction, and towards the valley sloping upwards to Wady Zerka Ma'in, we again reached the plateau, at one point of which there are distinct traces of a Roman road skirting a dilapidated round tower. This road continues its course

towards the south through a gently undulating country, and passes by more remains of ancient buildings; it answers to the description, given by old authorities, of the principal highway running from Hesbon past Baal Meon and Dibon to Rabbath-Moab and Kerak. Pursuing the road along an old arch of a bridge over the dry bed of a brook we reached Libb, a smaller place than Ma'in, but which contains caverns hewn out of a hardish kind of rock, and now used by the Bedouins as stables and barns. We descended the valley towards the south-east; it became narrower and more precipitous the further we went, and towards midday we reached the encampment of the friendly Sheikh Lafi', where the hospitality of the Bedouins necessitated our spending the night.

*April 16th.*—We went along the road which first skirts the top of the sloping sides of the valley towards the south and then winds along the ascent of the southern hill-side, at a place where the valley itself runs in a westerly direction. On arriving at the summit we again come upon traces of the Roman road near the ruin of a tower and cromlech. At a still higher point (2,150 feet above the sea) Wady Wali suddenly comes into view, stretching from east to west. It also possesses a tower and cromlech, from whence the descent of 500 feet is made by means of a steep zig-zag path. Here, in a broad part of the valley, and at the commencement of a smaller valley running south, is a hill about 150 feet high, but sufficiently precipitous, named Ras (head) el-Waly, from whose base a considerable spring proceeds, bearing the same name, and soon becoming a good-sized brook; it is full of fish and frogs, and is surrounded by oleander bushes. We made this our head-quarters for some days. Lower down the valley the brook is fed by other springs, and at a short distance further on there is a mill, that was not working at the time, because the mill stream had been put out of order by the winter floods, which had left traces of their overflow of from 70 to 80 paces wide, and from 10 feet to 12 feet deep.\* At this place, marked by the ruins of an ancient hamlet called 'Amman Getto (?), two valleys branch off, one of which running from the south is of a good size, and in it we find distinct traces of the old road to Dibon, while in the same direction the ruins of a bridge are to be found in the bed of the river. Between this point and the camp is a flat hill sloping to the east, west, and south; on its northern side alone there is a narrow path, defended by walls and a fosse, and covered with the ruins of an old village, which, however, showed no traces of Roman occupation. This place is called Skander (Iskander, Alexander). On the other side of the little valley, shut in on the east by this hill, and lying due north of the camp, are some scattered remains of houses, in the midst of which is a cromlech with a paved floor, and one large and several small hewn stones, some in an upright position and others lying on the ground. The largest of

\* Herr Schick's knowledge of mechanism enabled him to put the mill in temporary working order in a very short time, and it was hoped that the kindness he had shown the Bedouins might induce them to forward the real object of his journey, but this hope proved vain.

these is over 10 feet high, and is found on the southern side of the principal valley opposite the camp. It resembles in every respect the Wady Zerka Ma'in, which we shall describe later on, except that it shows no trace of any inscription.

As the journey here from our last encampment was a very short one, we took an hour's walk further up the valley in the afternoon, and found that we could again reach the plateau leading to Kubeibeh by means of a steep rocky path, ascending 600 feet, by following the southern branch of the valley called Wady Deeb and passing the ruin of Emku Nasrallah (Amka N. or Amku N.). One of the most considerable heap of ruins is situated on a precipitous peak to the north of the principal valley.

Half an hour's walk south of this place, on the other side of the valley, are a few ruined houses called Mak 'ad, and under these are about a dozen caves hewn out of the rock.

*April 20th.*—After having spent three days in making attempts at excavation, we continued our journey on the 20th of April. A long two hours' march from our last place of encampment along the eastern side of the valley Wady Abu Sidr, and following the course of the old road across the plateau, brought us to Diban, the ancient Dibon, which was so celebrated lately as Mesa's capital. It was built on two hills, the most northerly of which, although surrounded by deep valleys, was fortified by strong and in some places double walls, and in addition to these by a fosse hewn in the living rock, but uncompleted. This must have been the new town that was built after the Moabitish conquest under King Mesa, as is shown by the inscription. The southern quarter of the town was distinct from this, and was much less fortified. It may be called the more ancient Dibon of the tribe of Reuben. According to the statement of the Bedouins, who saw the stone before its removal from its original position, which statement is corroborated by the missionary Klein, Mesa's stone was found within a large cromlech; but strangely enough neither Klein nor Tristram mention this cromlech, although the Bedouins still honour it as the supposed tomb of a neby (prophet), and therefore regard it as a safe repository for anything of value. Close to this, on the south of the high town, are the ruins of a castellated building, within which is a white stone tablet with a few crosses and a rosette carved upon it. It serves as the cover of a grave, and the skeleton beneath is perceptible through the crevices. Another stone of black basalt struck us immediately on our arrival in the valley to the north-east of the town by the strangeness of its form, as it also did our predecessor Tristram, who held it to be a mill-stone.

The road to 'Ara'ir runs in an easterly direction over a high plain; the height on which the ruins are situated has only a slight elevation above this plateau; but on the southern side it has an unusually steep and rocky descent towards the narrow glen Wady Mojib (the ancient Arnon), whose watercourse down below is only perceptible by the green stripe of brushwood along its banks. This magnificent view, contrasting

splendidly with the high plateau, embraces, besides the principal valley, a second one stretching out towards the east, of almost equal size, and several smaller glens branching out from it.

The ancient town Aroer was of moderate size, and regularly built; there are distinct remains of a perfectly square wall built of large blocks of unhewn freestone, each of which was about 500 feet long; and 20 feet from it is a still higher inner wall; the highest central point is marked by some ruined buildings. Outside the walls, towards the north-east, are the remains of considerable suburbs; on the highest point, east by north, an upright stone is placed.

Half an hour's distance further south we come upon the much less important remains of Lejun, only remarkable for some stones with indecipherable hieroglyphics. We found several ancient cisterns amongst the ruins; they were perfectly dry, as the Bedouins have never given themselves the trouble of restoring the ruined conduits. Rather than do this, they let their women, whenever the encampment is pitched in this place, carry what water they require up the steep rocky path from the valley below.

On our return to Wady Wali we visited the ruins of Karjet-'Alejan, which, surrounded by a wall, are situated on a promontory jutting out between several flat Wadys; owing to the crumbly nature of the stone there are but few subterranean caverns to be found there.

After spending another day in exploring the Wady Wali, where the Arabs who accompanied us had remained encamped, all further excursions and explorations were brought to an abrupt close by the arrival of a messenger sent by the consul, who brought us news of the outbreak of the Russo-Turkish war. We were therefore obliged to return to Jerusalem by the shortest route, this time taking a westerly direction.

*April 22nd.*—The road ran under the rocky, narrow, and sometimes perpendicular cliffs overhanging the valley of Wady Zerka-Ma'in, and descended the same until it turned due west, at which place the sinuous course of the brook begins. High above this spot we came upon another upright stone, 10 feet high, with signs resembling letters carved upon it. The road now became more level, with cultivated fields on either side, until we reached the most north-west border of the plateau. Another descent brought us to the spring 'Ain Suweineh and here, among heaps of stones rich in iron ore, we pitched our tents for the night.

*April 23rd.*—We continued our route through the so-called Ghör-Seisebān, that sandy, unfruitful part of the plain lying near the Jordan, till we reached the ferry. Half an hour further on we passed the ruins of Suweineh (Beth-Jesimoth of the Old Testament), on the bank of a rapid stream; and an hour further we came to another ruined city, the name of which was unknown to our Arabs. The chief features of the country east of the Jordan are the numerous cisterns and caverns hewn in the chalk rocks, and often used as habitations. The flat-topped hills are generally covered with earth of a foot deep; there we find caves of from five

to six feet in height, and burrowing far into the mountain. They are partly hewn in the hard chalk rock, which covers a strata of softer chalk. The entrance is partially built up, leaving only a small aperture. Most of these caves have so many chambers communicating with them that they deserve the name of labyrinths. The soft chalk formation is not very substantial, nor is it deep enough for the low dwellings. To gain the necessary height, one or two layers of a conglomerate of flint, much harder than the chalk, but still easily broken, had to be pierced. This conglomerate is usually from nine to sixteen inches thick, in consequence of which the caverns, including their floors, are irregular in form and level, as they are dependent on the formation and layers of rock. We find a marked difference when we compare these caves with those hewn in the chalk rock at Jerusalem, which are perfectly regular in form. We occasionally find blocks of chalk rock close to the walls, which the inhabitants evidently left there, not only on account of the hardness of the rock, but also because they were useful as tables and seats. There are no traces of inscriptions, excepting a single raised letter on one of the many potsherds lying in the niche of a cavern at Mak'ad, about five feet above the floor. The caves are generally used as cellars for storing the provisions belonging to the houses which are built over them. It is true some stand isolated, but still they may always be looked upon as signs of the former presence of ancient buildings, for very few are completely isolated in the rocky sides of the valley.

Stone monuments as well as caves are found in considerable numbers on this eastern bank of the Jordan, while none are to be seen on the western. They resemble the rude memorial stones of a like nature in the Keltic countries of Western Europe. The same typical names have been used by other travellers for these Oriental monuments, and for that reason they are also used by us.

I. Dolmens consist of twenty-three or more perpendicular blocks of stone connected on the top by a horizontal slab; these are only found on the ascent from the valley of the Jordan to the plateau—not on the plateau itself, but on both roads leading to it.

II. Cromlechs are circles of stones of from twelve to fifteen feet in circumference, surrounding a paved floor, and all possessing a low entrance on their western side. To this day they are considered sacred by the natives, and on that account are called Nebi.

III. Menhirs are huge isolated columns of stone, are less frequently met with than the preceding, and, like them, are given on the map. The principal ones we saw were at Akfair, an hour south-west of Ma'ür and west of Wali, and at Aräer.

Only about one-tenth part of the plateau is used for agricultural purposes; it is totally devoid of stones and trees; indeed, we only met with two specimens of these out of the well-watered valleys.