



Panoramic View of 'Ain Shems (left) and Rumeileh-Beth-Shemesh (right), looking south.

THE ANCIENT SITE OF 'AIN SHEMS, WITH A  
MEMORANDUM ON THE PROSPECTS OF EXCAVATION.<sup>1</sup>

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THE ancient site of 'Ain Shems is situated on a well-defined southern height of the Wādy es-Surār, only twenty minutes away to south-south-west of the station of Deir Aban. It is hardly more than ten

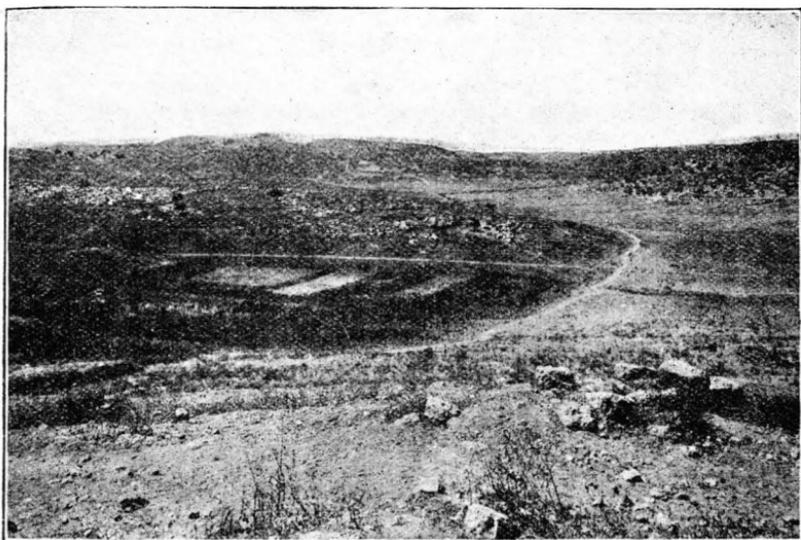


Fig. 1.—View South from Tell Rumeileh (Beth-Shemesh).

minutes' walk in a direct line south and to right of the railway, at its nearest point before the train stops at the station, on its way beyond Ramleh from Jaffa to Jerusalem. The site is essentially a prolongation westward into the lower valley lands of a spur of higher eastern hills whose glens give access to the wider valleys and to the mountains of Judah (*see* Plate).

<sup>1</sup> For a good account of the historical associations of the site of Beth-Shemesh *see* S. A. Cook, *Q.S.*, July, 1910, pp. 220-231.

Beyond the site, as one approaches from the north side, is the rural vista of one of these valleys now rich with all the greenery and flowers of spring. This is the Wādy Bulus, and its waters in periods of rain join themselves with those of the main stream (*see* Fig. 1).

The spur on which lies 'Ain Shems projects westwards into the outlet of this lateral glen, as if on purpose to cut off the flow of its waters into the larger valley.

Here lies the strength of the position of 'Ain Shems. It commands the southern valley, at the same time that to northwards, it overlooks



Fig. 2.—Approach to 'Ain Shems from the North-east.

the level meadows and the main outlet westward of the greater valley of Sorek. Not only so, but it is noticeable that our road from Deir Aban Station approaches 'Ain Shems in a way which indicates that it is going to pass over the shoulder of the spur on which the ancient site is placed, in order thus, by a short cut, to gain the valley of Bulus beyond (*see* Plate).<sup>1</sup> The roadway here and there shows signs of being an ancient one, and it is probable we are here on the track of an old caravan route with south-western trend

<sup>1</sup> Plate : Left-hand side.

joining on to some main way from Judah and connecting 'Ain Shems with Tell es-Safi, Tell el-Hesi and Gaza.<sup>1</sup> 'Ain Shems is thus an instance of how old caravan routes determine the general line of cities whose actual locality depends on some local advantage of position. The local caravan route was between Gaza, Gath, and the upland townships of Judah connected with the Valley of Sorek, the direction was S.W.—N.E. at 'Ain Shems, and thus the shoulder of the spur had to be crossed if there was not to be a *détour* to westward round its point.<sup>2</sup> Caravan routes make straight for cities in their track, and the caravanserais in the midst of Oriental townships

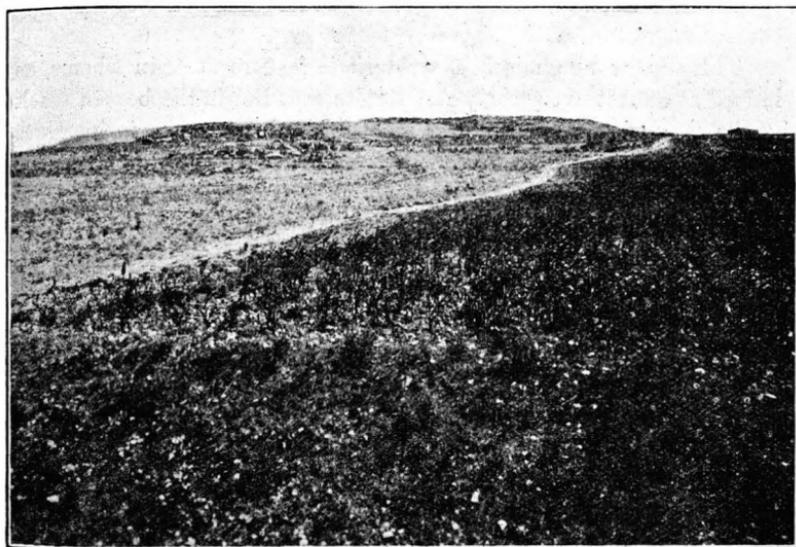


Fig. 3.—Distant view of Rumeileh—Beth-Shemesh, looking north.

is as old as history. The phenomenon is one of curious interest in the East, and the positions of ancient cities in Asia might well and profitably be studied from this point of view alone. The importance

<sup>1</sup> See the interesting account of ancient routes about 'Ain Shems by Principal G. A. Smith, *Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, p. 219; also *Q.S.*, July, 1910, p. 182.

<sup>2</sup> See Fig. 2: Rumeileh, looking south-west. Camels on an old caravan route. Fig. 3: Rumeileh, looking north. The old camel track ascending from Wādy Bulus towards Rumeileh—'Ain Shems.

of ancient centres of Asiatic civilization stands indeed in a direct relation to their being on caravan routes or not, and the distance of early townships from these routes is usually a gauge of the greater or less degree of provincialism in their life. Many minor tells in the remoter valley regions about 'Ain Shems afford illustration of this provincialism, while Gath and Lachish, on the main caravan routes, in the days of their ancient prime were second only to Gaza and Askelon themselves.

The caravan route makes a dip or notch for itself in the contour of ancient cities as it passes through them, which has its explanation in the fact that throughout history roadways tend to keep the same invariable level, while the city grows and rises on either side in the course of ages.

This dip or notch is a characteristic feature at 'Ain Shems, as indeed at almost every early Asiatic site that lies in the beaten track of the caravan route. But the story of its occurrence is intricate and exceptional in the broken hilly country of Judah, simpler in the wide plains of Philistia from Gath to Gaza, simplest and least exceptional of all perhaps in upland Moab with its great illimitable outlook towards the mighty, unchanging East. Here is no change, except it be the shifting of the infinite Asiatic horizon; nothing to break the calm monotony of those undulating uplands, with their immemorial camel tracks across the emerging tells, unless it be the one sublime illusion of the Asiatic mirage.

If ever one has been to Madeba or its neighbour eastward, Tell Jelul, or best of all to Rabbath Moab, the dip or notch in the shoulder of the tell of 'Ain Shems will seem characteristic and familiar. The dip of the roadway passes over, leaving a Muslim wely immediately to the left, and behind this on the rising spur the confused remains of an Arab village dominated by a second wely further east (*see* Plate).<sup>1</sup> All this is 'Ain Shems proper, and it is so-called by the fellahin of the present day. It is possible that this region formed an important part of the ancient township, but the higher building of the Arab village and welys, and the long processes of denudation combined, have done so thoroughly their work of obliteration of any earlier remains there may have been that hardly any deposit now remains on the naked surface of the limestone rock.

<sup>1</sup> Plate: Left-hand side.

Still higher up to eastward are tombs and other rock-cut chambers of uncertain date which may be cisterns, and with these, as is so usual where there is any hope of treasure-trove, Nature has dealt more kindly than the hand of man.

To right of the dip again, all that now remains of the ancient township rises to a higher platform and then descends gradually to westward. This is the lower west end of the spur, and in contrast to the higher east part is called locally Rumeileh (*see* Fig. 3). Here are the most considerable depths of deposit left behind in the gradual process of denudation of the site, and here also are the most important wall remains still spared by the hand of man. On the level area of the higher platform referred to already are the deep foundations of an enormous building, which turns out on closer inspection to be the remains of what at one time was a Byzantine church. The massive foundation walls of this, running east-west and north-south, cover an area so extensive in the east region of the site as to be calculable at hardly much less than a third of the whole. Into these foundations are built the massive blocks with characteristic *rustica* embossment of earlier town walls. There are other blocks of finer make from earlier private houses or public buildings. With such indications to hand it was all too clear that this edifice was not erected without much damage, both to what pre-existed on the spot and to previous buildings around, including the fortification walls in the environment. The earlier deposit here, as elsewhere on Rumeileh, is not of any very considerable depth. Accordingly the massive foundations of this building, going down probably to the virgin rock, cannot have been laid without much disturbance and injury to this earlier deposit and the concomitant walls that happened to come in the way of the builders. In all cases of monumental buildings erected on earlier sites with miscellaneous materials a double process of destruction is always involved: (*a*) There is the disturbance to and removal of earlier deposits and walls in connection with the laying of massive foundations; (*b*) There is the removal and appropriation of building materials from edifices around towards the erection of the new walls. Considering the large area covered by the Byzantine remains referred to and the consequent great size of the building presupposed by them, there can be no doubt whatever that both the processes referred to above took place on a very considerable scale at the time the church was being built on the mound of Rumeileh.

When I myself visited 'Ain Shems for the first time in April of last year the site was entirely covered with the luxuriant vegetation of an unusually late spring. Thus it was a matter of considerable difficulty to judge of the remains by such surface indications as are usually visible to the eye when the herbage has withered away later in the year.

One fact, however, was very patent: the site, enclosed as it is in valley country among rocky limestone hills, was certain to be one of stone constructions. I had come here straight from Gezer, and the similarity of both sites in this respect was noticeable at the first glance. The hill sites thus presented to my mind a marked contrast to mounds like Tell el-Hesy, where the country is alluvial, and rock or good building stone is at a discount, and where accordingly the remains are largely of mud and rubble construction. But all the same, the mud and rubble sites have a much better chance of survival at the hands of posterity than those of stone. The reason is that mud sites are not turned over for building materials while stone sites usually are, and indeed are certain to be, whenever building operations are going on near at hand. Tell el-Hesy and 'Ain Shems are respectively cases in point. The mound of Lachish, when first the attention of the world was drawn to it through the work of Prof. Flinders Petrie, lay intact to his hand as left by Nature and time alone. At 'Ain Shems, with its treasures of ready-cut building stones, all later generations of men, whether Christian or Arab, have vied with each other in this zealous work of spoliation. The Byzantine church on the one hand and the Arab welys and village on the other are but the most outstanding landmarks in this process. And 'Ain Shems has suffered in this way as few other sites in Palestine have done. If, indeed, the west or Rumeileh end of the site has suffered less in this way than the east end called 'Ain Shems, it is that apparently the occupation of the west end ceased with the thorough destruction of the Byzantine church, whereas Arab occupation in the east half, about the welys, has continued off and on till the present day.

There is, however, another concomitant in these phenomena of occupation. After the complete annihilation of the Christian population, presumably at the time of the destruction of the Byzantine church, the place became "a desolation and a hissing": the ploughshare passed over it, and it was seemingly never again the habitation of men. But here a kindly Mother Nature stepped

in to smooth away and heal the poignant wounds of religious and racial conflict. With the passage of the ploughshare the fertile slopes of Rumeileh were henceforth dedicate to the rural arts of peace. It was now to be for evermore but a gentle incident in the tranquil peasant's toil of those lonely valleys. In this still present there is but one living reminiscence of antique times, and it is when a string of camels emerges over the dip of 'Ain Shems passing along the primitive track of the caravan route from Gath as in the days of old (*see* Fig. 2). Or, haply, that longer queue of camels looming up the Wādy es-Surār is from the Plain of Sharon and has passed by Akir and Ramleh as it now is skirting Rumeileh of 'Ain Shems keeping ever faithful as of yore to that old route of traffic from Ekron to Beth-Shemesh and the hills of Judah. Not even the daily passing of our modern trains, or the new movement towards Zion, has managed to alter that; not even the utter abandonment of a thousand years and more has been enough to turn aside the old caravan route to other tracks of traffic. The unswerving stability of that goes back to causes that are as old as Asia. And who knows but that some day the ancient tell, like many such in Moab, may once more resound with the joyous hum of busy rural life. But that would have its reason, not in the daily passing of our modern trains with crowds of tourists and of pilgrims, however well disposed, but in the renascent cultivation of those fair and fertile valleys, in the re-afforestation of those naked hills, and in the intensive tilling of the rich plains of Philistia as in the days of yore. Then, indeed, the strings of camels laden with the fruits of more abundant harvests would be longer and more frequent—but not changed. And once again the valleys would be filled more fully with the tranquil, joyous stir of busy harvest as in that olden time—as on that day of days when once in dreamy distance of that western valley there hove in sight, coming from Ekron, that rural miracle of the Ark drawn by two milch kine that had never known the yoke. "And the kine took the straight way to the way of Beth-Shemesh, and went along the highway, lowing as they went, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left; and the lords of the Philistines went after them unto the border of Beth-Shemesh. And they of Beth-Shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley; and they lifted up their eyes, and saw the Ark, and rejoiced to see it."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 1 Samuel vi, 12-13.

One knows that rural scene of harvest with its miracle of the Ark almost as if one saw it. But how are we to conjure up the vision of that ancient city of the valley? How repace once more the streets and alleys of that time, enter the houses, revisit the city's temple or high place, behold once more its palace? That is a legerdemain that belongs alone to the romance of excavation.

And, true enough, the one great hope of 'Ain Shems would be that the ruins of the Byzantine church, in spite of all the damage its construction must inevitably have caused to earlier buildings beneath and around it, might turn out to occupy the site of an earlier temple or of the Royal Palace, if such there were. I have already referred to the level area of the higher platform on which this church was built, and the eminent position of this, and its relation to its environment, makes it seem indeed the most important on the site. When I first visited 'Ain Shems, I was at once struck by the position of this building and its relation to right and westward of a roadway passing south. This gives the position an orientation eastward which would suit the frontage of a temple. The position is thus so typical that there are many analogies for it elsewhere, and, to give only one instance, it exactly corresponds to the temple area, westward of a roadway going south, at Rabbath Moab. Indeed, at first sight, there did not seem to be anything in the appearance of the building at Rumeileh calculated much to contradict the idea that it might be a late Roman temple built, it is true, of miscellaneous materials from earlier buildings. It must be remembered that we have here hardly more than the foundations of the building in question and, showing out from the luxuriant herbage of the spring, there was nothing that palpably struck the eye calculated to decide either way. We searched about for decorative features such as column drums, fragments of cornice or architrave, but there was apparently nothing of that sort. Then it was that we discovered, half-concealed in the interior of the building, a characteristic Byzantine capital of elongated rectangular shape such as are so common in the East. There are several very similar in the Museum at Alexandria, and, like so many architectural forms, Roman as well as Byzantine, typical of Southern Syria, it is possible that it is in Egypt that we have to look for the immediate predecessors of this variety of Byzantine capital. In view of this capital it was no longer possible to question the character of the building within which it was found. When I visited 'Ain Shems in the late summer, at

a time when all the herbage was withered away, though many details were much clearer to the eye, no essentially new features were to be made out, and, to our surprise, the Byzantine capital was nowhere to be found. It was not at all to be supposed that having been there apparently on the surface for centuries, it had been removed in the short interval since the spring; it was simply, I concluded, no longer readily distinguishable by the eye in the midst of the many fallen blocks that were now visible.

I have already referred to the interesting possibility of an earlier temple on the same site presented by the position and orientation of our Byzantine church in relation to the high road. But the same advantages of orientation and position make the presence of the principal residential edifice of the city on the spot an equally possible and no less interesting alternative. Orientation with frontage eastwards has always been a time-honoured usage of palatial construction in the Nearer East, which may very well turn out to have one more illustration at Rumeileh of 'Ain Shems. And now that we have Dr. Reisner's startling discovery at Samaria of palace records and inventories in the shape of ink-written ostraca in Hebrew, belonging to the time, and apparently the household, of King Ahab, it is no longer a far-fetched idea to conceive the possibility of similar discoveries at kingly residences on other sites.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the new discovery makes it the first duty of archaeologists opening up new sites in Palestine to concentrate their principal attention on such princely or kingly residences and their immediate environments. Every other aim should be subordinated to this. The probability of the discovery of inscribed documents is greatest in and about the principal residential building on any site, and next to that in the dwellings of notables who may be supposed to have belonged to the more intimate entourage of the princely or royal house, and, as a rule, are found to have their habitations in areas of vantage in relation to the environment of the residence. Such discoveries are a matter of very little probability, indeed, in the case of regions occupied by the common population of ancient sites not in immediate touch with the higher affairs of its rulers.

No doubt where skilled labour is unattainable, and there is no expert archaeological superintendence available to begin with, there is a certain risk in commencing an excavation with the principal

<sup>1</sup> See below, p. 79.

building on a site. On the other hand, the stratification in the case of an edifice which forms a unity, and has well-marked floor-levels, is usually much less intricate than in town-areas where one changes almost at every step from house to house, and from later to earlier floors, few of which are ever well defined. Not only so, however, but it is often a matter of convenience in the excavation of a site which falls away down on all sides, to start operations at the highest point. This procedure obviates the chance of cutting off one's exits which is run by a start at the periphery of a site. If along with this there are indications that the most important building is at the highest and most central point of a site we have a double reason for starting operations there. This is particularly true of mound sites, like many of those in Syria, with inarticulate surface indications. It is very different with monumental sites showing characteristic architectural features above ground. The position of a great temple, or other monumental building, on such a site usually appears at first sight. It is thus a curious phenomenon in the history of excavation, that in the earlier days of exploration archaeological science was hardly occupied with anything else than the excavation of temple sites. In those days the importance of stratification was hardly ever understood: city sites were hardly ever excavated. Now, however, with the intense growth of scientific interest in the stratification of deposit on ancient sites we often have results the opposite of the above. Absorption in this interest often leads exploration of a site into channels so devious as to divert attention altogether from such questions of topography as that concerning the position of a city's most important buildings. This again is especially apt to happen in the case of mound sites with no articulate surface indications such as might afford a clue. Sometimes, indeed, the excavator is put out of his reckoning by finding that the presumed temple, or princely house, is after all, not at the highest point of a site, as he may have conjectured, but for some unknown special reason on some other spot to which he has no apparent clue. Then, indeed, he may run serious risk of missing his temple or residence altogether, unless he is prepared for an exhaustive exploration of a whole site.

The special difficulty about many Syrian mound sites lacking in monumental features above ground is this absence of apparent clues. In their case one has usually to fall back on general considerations of topography such as the position and orientation of the highest

point of a site in relation to a passing roadway. Such considerations are particularly suggestive in the case of a site like 'Ain Shems. Only here a special clue may be afforded by the presence on this highest area of the Byzantine church referred to already. In such a case it will seem reasonable to have recourse to the general considerations of topography we have in mind, and begin the excavation of Rumeileh-'Ain Shems with the Byzantine church and the area between it and the roadway to east of it. On this would then follow the exploration of the lower lying west half of the site which conjecturally may be regarded as the Lower Town of Rumeileh. Alongside of this, in some quiet interval of excavation, such as is afforded by the operations of the harvest season, would come the investigation of the necropolis of 'Ain Shems.

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## THE DISCOVERIES AT SAMARIA.

By THE REV. PROF. S. R. DRIVER, D.D., M.B.A.<sup>1</sup>

PROF. KITTEL, of Leipzig, has just published in the *Theologisches Literaturblatt* (1911, Nos. 3 and 4) two articles on these discoveries, which, though not exhaustive, contain fuller and more accurate particulars than have hitherto appeared. His articles are based upon one by Prof. Lyon, of Harvard, in the *Harvard Theological Review* for January, which, in its turn, is founded upon a report made by the excavator, Prof. Reisner, himself. The statements may consequently be regarded as authoritative. The accounts which first appeared in this country, it is now clear, were exaggerated. The English newspapers reported correctly what was stated by Dr. Yahuda in the *Berlin Tageblatt* of January 19th; but Dr. Yahuda—who, by the way, is a learned and capable Jewish scholar—appears to have been in some way misled by his Jerusalem informant. Prof. Kittel refers to his mistake, but does not entirely explain it, all that he says being that he has seen the information received by

<sup>1</sup> From *The Guardian* of February 10th, 1911, with permission of the Editor and with the Author's revisions and additions.