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ARABIC TRADITION  
AND TOPOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH

BY  
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## Arabic Tradition and Topographical Research

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### Ruins, Tombs and Saints

A spiritual world, peopled by supernatural beings, occupies a very prominent position in the thinking of the primitive Arabs. Spirits (*jinn*) generally appear to symbolize phenomena which, in the eyes of an Arab, are strange, undesirable and harmful in their origin and effect.

Mountain tops, dreary ravines, caves and other lonely and remote places are regarded as favourite haunts of the spirits. This being so, it is only natural that *ruins*, giving rise to all sorts of wild conjectures and evoking a feeling of awe mingled with fear, are, according to the Arabs, the preferred abodes of the *jinn*.

This was observed, e.g., by G. A. Wallin in his travels. He was told by the Bedouins that »immeasurable» treasures were guarded by the *jinn* under the ruins near *ma'ān*, and to ward off undesirable suspicions he had to desist from a detailed inspection of the ruins (*Reseanteckningar från Orienten åren 1843—1849*, published by S. G. Elmgren, Helsingfors 1864—6, III, p. 146). Not only ruins but also rock inscriptions were, to the Arabs, an indication of occult treasures presided over by the *jinn*. These were often said to assume the form of reptiles — a notion still current among the Bedouins.

It is, therefore, understandable that the Bedouins never camp in the vicinity of ruins. They believe that the body of a man sleeping at or near a dwelling place of the *jinn* becomes the host of one of

them and that the unfortunate sleeper thereby becomes possessed by an evil spirit (*mahšūš*, *majnūn*).

In many respects, ideas of this kind represent an absolute truth to the primitive Arab. This is illustrated by the account (heard by Wallin) of an itinerant Negro quack who managed to cheat considerable sums of money out of the covetous Arabs by promising to make available to them earth-hidden treasures guarded by a *jinn*, allegedly under his dominion (Wallin, III, pp. 158—9).

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Awe-inspired respect for graves and cemeteries is an integral part of Mohammedan town civilization. Particular reverence is felt towards the graves of »saints» and other remarkable men.

In the cemetery of *aswān*, Wallin saw a number of tombstones, said by local inhabitants to hide the corpses of several companions of the Prophet (*aṣḥāb*) who had participated in the conquest of Egypt (Wallin, II, p. 397). The natives held those graves in especial veneration, and Wallin was shown a tombstone, the surface of which was disfigured by a groove. This had reportedly been produced by a riflebullet discharged by a soldier wanting to manifest his utter disregard for the saints. The bullet had ricocheted from the stone, killing the offender on the spot (*ibid.*).

Near the graves there were several bed-like formations made by piling stone slabs one on top of another and called *murkād* (from the root *r-k-d*, to lie down, to sleep). According to local tradition, a barren woman would become fertile by spending a night on a *murkād* (Wallin, II, p. 398) a cure obviously attributed to the miraculous powers of the adjacent graves of the *aṣḥāb*.

Belief in the curative effect of saints' tombs was at Wallin's time widespread even in other parts of Egypt. In Cairo, the so-called *mālbūs* women (harassed by »demonbegotten» injuries or illnesses) used to visit the tombs of their patron saints once a week. This procedure was believed to free the women of their ills or, at the very least, to mitigate them (Wallin, I, pp. 352—353, II, pp. 107—108).

Owing to the great regard for graves felt by the Moslems, Wallin

could visit the *ḥarām* area of Jerusalem only by posing as a believer (Wallin, III, p. 430).

In spite of this attitude, the care of graves is often utterly neglected by the Mohammedans, and Wallin tells us that Moslem burying-places frequently presented a sorry sight (Wallin, II, p. 399). One reason for this may be found in the express prohibition of Mohammed to erect masonry tombs (cf. *miškāt al-maṣābīḥ*, V, 6), an injunction which, however, has never been respected in the greater part of the Mohammedan world.

The domain of the *wahhābī* movement or, roughly, the present-day Saudi Arabian territory, is the only major sector of the Mohammedan world where reverence for graves is virtually non-existent. The basic reason for this may be the negligent attitude of desert Bedouins who, on account of their itinerant mode of living, are unable to pay any attention whatever to the tending of graves.

Some respect is, however, shown to graves in the towns of Arabia. Near *muwaila*, on the Red Sea coast, Wallin saw a cemetery where the corpses of leading citizens used to be buried (Wallin, IV, pp. 74—80). At *jawf*, a typical desert town, he was conducted to a place said to contain the earthly remains of Alexander the Great, the strangely ubiquitous *dū al-ḳarnain* of Arabic legends (Wallin, III, p. 174).

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The cult of saints is still a common phenomenon in Palestine — both among the Mohammedans and the Christians — and popular thinking even regards the saints (*walī*)<sup>1</sup> as beings endowed with greater power than God himself. Violation of oaths taken in their shrines is considered an unpardonable offence, and foul language, otherwise so common in the East, is rarely heard in or near them. As a matter of fact, a *walī* is nearer to the average uneducated Palestinian than God who, as a concept, frequently tends to remain more or less an abstraction.

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<sup>1</sup> G. A. Wallin was called *'abdu l-walī* by the Arabs.

Mohammedan orthodoxy holds that the saints are but mediators between men and Allah. There is a great difference between this opinion and the views current among the unlearned masses. A Moslem doctor might say: »A vow is addressed to Allah and not to a *walī*, but it is preferably made at a *walī*'s grave as a token of respect for him and, simultaneously, in order to pay indirect homage to Allah». On the contrary, the unlearned man would say: »A vow is really made to a *walī*, who thereby becomes a lord.»

In practice, these beings are regarded as minor gods, and Christian Arabs apply to them the Aramaic appellation *mar* (lord, saint); Saint George, e.g., is known in Syria as *mār jirjis*.

The corresponding Mohammedan term is *walī* (vulg. *weli*) meaning »close relative» or »protector». In the Arabic version of the Bible, Job harangues God, who is called *walī*, and Ruth is represented as placing her faith in Boas, her *walī* or next of kin. In both passages the original Hebrew word is *gō'ēl*.

In Koranic usage *walī* is frequently met with both in the singular (being usually coterminous with Allah) and in the plural (*awliyā'*, rendered into other languages as »protectors, patrons»). As a technical term, it is a fairly comprehensive one covering a saint's person as well as his grave, or a holy place in general. On the other hand, different terms are used for those saints who are Biblical characters (or are supposed to have lived in Biblical times) and for those who are said to have lived after Mohammed. The former are called *nabī*, and the latter *šēh*.

Obviously, the application of *walī* to Allah is contrary to the teachings of the Koran and Mohammedan law. Nevertheless, many pious Moslems assert that not to believe in a *walī* is equivalent to not believing in Allah himself. Theoretically every piece of hallowed ground implies the existence of a *walī*.

Many saints are mysterious beings of whom not much is known, but a saint may, according to popular belief, sometimes materialize and reveal himself to his most devoted worshippers. Many people see their only god in some local saint.

The cult of a *walī* in Palestine may be compared to the adoration

of an ancient *ba'al*.<sup>1</sup> It is, in many ways, closely connected with traces of animistic worship of trees, stones, etc. Thus certain trees are still held in veneration in Syria and Palestine. They are regarded as the property of particular saints, but the worship and sacrifices due to these are easily diverted to the trees themselves, and the cult so arising may assume different forms. The branches of a holy tree may, e.g., be hung with rags which are supposed to act as a constant reminder to the tree to show favour to the worshipper in question. A sick man may use a similar device to recover his health, by transferring the ailment through the rags from his body to the tree. On the other hand, a suffering person sometimes tears off a rag hung on the branches of a holy tree and starts to wear it as a strength-

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<sup>1</sup> *Šejeret el-mzerūt* is a place with two holy trees, *Pistacia Palaestina*, called in Arabic *buṭm*, situated two kilometres South of *ḥirbet šemsīn*, on the southern precipice of the gorge of *wādi fejjās*. These trees do not stand on the highest level of the mountain ridge, but on its outermost projection. Here the view is very extensive over the whole plain of *sahl el-aḥma* and the western side of the Sea of Galilee as far as *ḡarn hattīn*, and southward over the Jordan Valley. Thus the tree itself on the detached projection is very distinctly visible from the whole district around.

There is a lengthy pile of basaltic stones under it which is a holy tomb adorned with small green, red and white flags and rags. There is salt, etc. in earthen vessels of varied forms. A high circular stone fence surrounds the tomb. Around it there are low huts without window-holes, built of mud and small stones. A low stone fence surrounds all these buildings, and further on there are heaps of basaltic stones. All these bear traces of having been lately repaired. Outermost there are larger basaltic blocks scattered around. The field west of the tree, i.e., the narrow saddle that connects the projection with the mountain range, is 150 m. long. The summit of this saddle is flat and big enough for a settlement, but it does not bear the usual marks of ancient habitation, since the soil is black without any gray debris. Yet a lot of Bronze age potsherds together with some Arabic ones have been found on the saddle. They are too few to form the remains of an old settlement. Therefore the site may be an ancient place of worship, where earthen vessels had been used also in ancient times for cult purposes in the same way as now. The path descending northwards to *ḥirbet šemsīn* forms in some places a channel (40 cm. in breadth and depth) in the limestone rock. This seems to testify to an ancient and still continued use of the path.

giving amulet. To holy trees are also attributed other »magical» powers.<sup>1</sup>

Stones, too, are frequently objects of worship. It is not always known which saint is the proprietor of a particular holy stone and the notions concerning his person and attributes may be extremely vague, but offerings are brought to the stones themselves and sacrificial blood is sprinkled upon them. Here again, we have a case of syncretism between ancient Semitic practices and modern Moham-medan ones.

Saints are also thought of as abiding in the vicinity of »sacred waters.» The relation of a particular saint to such a body of water is here again conceived as a proprietary one but the difference between a saint and a water spirit is not infrequently very slight. Among the unlearned, pollution of water is held to be an offence against the saints, and water itself is sometimes revered as a god or a godlike manifestation. The hot springs by the Sea of Galilee are regarded as being ruled over by a *walī* or a spirit (*jinn*). Their healing properties are used for curing rheumatic illnesses and the natives perform sacrifices to the patron *walī* of the springs, hoping thereby to induce him to keep the fires heating them alive.<sup>2</sup>

### Religion and Palestinian Toponymy

There are numerous localities in Palestine which are still called by the same names (more or less modified) as they were some three, or even four thousand years ago. Scores of modern Palestinian place names, usually arabicized, can be traced back to their primeval forms such as they occur in the cuneiform texts and in the Old Testament.

<sup>1</sup> An oath sworn by the holy tree of *š. el-mz.* is much greater and firmer than an oath by the prophet, or by his beard, or by Allah himself. Whoever is ready to go under the tree to swear by the tombs is held surely innocent by everybody. The Arabs believe that one committing perjury will certainly fall down upon the holy tombs under the tree and die at once.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the Arabic geographers Yakut (Tabariye) and Idrisi (Jaubert I 347—348).



In many ways, this is a striking phenomenon. It is to be remembered that successive waves of different civilizations have swept over Palestinian soil, most of them displaying a certain tendency to change or adapt place names employed by the preceding ones. Further, there is the fact that these names were not, at least in the Mohammedan period, protected by a conservative *literary* tradition, since the Arabic population of Palestine has been almost wholly illiterate. Furthermore, Palestine has been a battlefield, not only of conflicting forms of civilization, but also of different religions. In the Canaanite age there were numerous localities all with their own minor *ba'als* or local deities. This age was followed by three monotheistic ages (Israelite, Christian, Mohammedan) during which a bitter battle was fought against the cult of the ancient local deities.

Under such circumstances, it is striking that many of the sacred places of the Canaanite religion have retained both their character of »holiness» and their names up to the present day. What is the explanation for this phenomenon?

The primary reason is, in our opinion, to be found in the strong conservative influence of *religion*. Places of worship, cult centres, shrines, holy graves — in a word, localities having strong religious associations — often seem to acquire, in the lapse of centuries, a special quality, an *inherent sanctity*, which does not necessarily disappear when the religion which has produced it gives way to a new one. The effects of such continuity may be, e.g., the transferring of the localities themselves into the service of the victorious religion, or the survival of their names (or the ideas contained in them), or both.

This may be illustrated by many Palestinian place names containing, or having contained, the element *bēt* (house), indicating cult associations. Cases in point are, e.g., *bēt-ḥōrōn* (from *ḥaurān*, the Canaanite god of the underworld (cf. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, pp. 80—81), *bēt-ʿanāt* and *bēt-šemeš* (both mentioned in Joshua), now called respectively by the modern Arabic names *el-eb'ēne* and *'ain šems*, *bēt-ēl*, Ar. *bētīn*, *bēt-ba'al-me'ōn*, Ar. *ma'īn*, *bēt-dāgōn* (Acc. *bīt daganna*), Ar. *bēt dağān*, *bēt-še'ān*, Ar. *beisān*, etc.

The topographical research of Palestine is, accordingly, much indebted to purely »religious» factors, but their influence has not been wholly positive. Generally speaking, O. T. place names have been better preserved, and the traditions relating to them are more trustworthy, than those occurring in the N. T.<sup>1</sup> The reason for this is that Christian ecclesiastical tradition has often tampered with N. T. place names and twisted traditions concerning them. The location of religiously important places has, in other words, been determined by certain »opportunistic» considerations.<sup>2</sup>

In commemoration of Wallins dedication to the area around the Sea of Galilee we shall, in what follows, concentrate on problems connected with this region.

#### *Bet-Yerah — House of the Moon*

The site of the important town of Tarichea of Roman times, on the Sea of Galilee, has long presented a puzzling problem. The proposed solutions can be divided in two main groups.

On the one hand, Tarichea is said to have been at the modern *majdal*, North of Tiberias, whereas many scholars have, on the other hand, been inclined to place it at the present-day site of *kerak*, at the southernmost end of the lake.

The hypothesis favouring Kerak as the probable site of Tarichea is supported by Pliny, who states in his Natural History (V. 15,2) that it was to the South both of Tiberias and the entire lake.

According to Josephus, the population of the town was consider-

<sup>1</sup> Re O. T. place names which have survived West of the Sea of Galilee, see Saarisalo, *The Boundary between Issachar and Naphtali*, pp. 118—129.

<sup>2</sup> Thus, many N. T. localities were unduly declared to be within the territory possessed by the Crusaders. Important objects of pilgrimage were mostly placed as near one another as possible, simply for greater convenience, and such places as Jerusalem and Nazareth exercised a powerful influence, acting as »magnets» which attracted many pilgrim points into their neighbourhood. Similar motives, though to a lesser degree, have influenced the location of the sacred places of the Jews and the Mohammedans. See Hertzberg, *Die Tradition in Palästina*, PJB, 1926, pp. 84—104.

able (appr. 80,000 inhabitants). Even allowing this figure to be exaggerated, it seems probable, however, that the comparatively insignificant ruins at *majdal* do not justify the identification of Tarichea with it, notwithstanding certain data given by Josephus, which would favour this possibility. The area of the ruins at *kerak* is, on the other hand, sufficiently large.

The Talmudic name of *kerak* is *bēt-yeraḥ* «the house of the moon». It has an accidental phonetic resemblance with the name of Tarichea, or Greek *Ταριχέα* (cf. *bet-yeraḥ* — *ταρχ*). Not far to the South is the ancient site *tell el-'abadīye*, which can be identified with the *bēt šemeš*, «house of the sun» in Josh. 19: 22. As in many other cases, the pre-Roman mound (*tell*) is called by a descriptive name (*el-'abadīye*), and the ancient name *bēt šemeš* is transported to a Roman settlement (*ḥirbet šemsīn*). On the mountain to the West of *el-'abadīye* there is a holy shrine and an area of ruins with holy trees in *ḥirbet šemsīn* itself, and higher up, a little to the South, *šejeret el-mzerīt* with two holy *butm* trees.

There were several towns named Tarichea in the Roman Empire. This name was derived from the Greek *Ταριχέα*, meaning a house for salting fish (from *τάριχος*, body, mummy; salted or cured meat, fish, etc.). Strabo specifically mentions (3. 1. 8) that the Galilean Tarichea had got its name from the salt-fish industry carried on there. The Sea of Galilee was famed for its abundant fish, and salted fish was exported from its shores to various parts of the Roman Empire.

The whole tract of land on both sides of the spot where the Jordan leaves the Sea of Galilee was called *arḍ el-mellāḥa* by the Arab population of the region, according to observations I made as late as in 1920. The term means a «place of salt», i. e., a place where salt is, in one way or another, a prominent factor, although there are no geological salt deposits there (contrary to the assertion of travellers, Seetzen I, p. 354, IV, p. 177).

The conceptual identity between the Arabic name tradition and the Greco-Roman Tarichea is, consequently, obvious. It offers a basis for concluding that the great bulk of fish caught in the Sea of Galilee, destined for export, was first conveyed to the south end

of the sea where it was salted. Hence it was afterwards sent to the world markets, chiefly by the western caravan route leading to Ptolemais-'akkā.

The fact should also be taken into account that, especially as a juncture of trade routes, the region of modern *kerak* is much more appropriate to be the site of ancient Tarichea than the *majdal* neighbourhood (which, as regards communications, belonged to a sort of »hinterland«).

Moreover, the salting-houses of the *mellāḥa* area obviously had to procure their salt from the Dead Sea region. As the distance from there to *kerak* is shorter than that to *majdal*, the Tarichea — *kerak* hypothesis gets additional support from this fact.

The hypothesis is further justified by the meaning of the name of the nearby village of *samak* (»fish«), at the southern extremity of the sea. At this part of the sea the shore rises, as a perpendicular bank, to the height of about 10 meters, offering no facilities for fishing. The most plausible explanation for *samak* as the name of the village is, consequently, that it is a remainder from the days when large quantities of fish were salted in the district.

#### *Bethabara*

Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist at a place called *Bηθαβαρα* or, according to some MSS, *Bηθαβαρα* (Jn. 1: 28), which is traditionally identified with *mahādet ḥajle* at the confluence of *wādi el-kelt* and the Jordan. No serious scientific arguments have, however, been found in support of this identification.

It seems probable, on the other hand, that *mahādet ḥajle* is too far away from Galilee to have been the site of this event. We read, in Jn. 2: 1, that Jesus was at »Cana of Galilee« on the third day after having conversed with Nathanael. Had the baptism really taken place at *mahādet ḥajle*, this would imply that Jesus covered a distance of more than 100 kilometers of rough terrain in two days, shortly after having fasted for 40 consecutive days in the desert. Besides, even his other activities as related by the Evangelists point

to his having sojourned, in those days, somewhere *near* Galilee but not *in* it (cf. Jn. 1: 44 ff.)

It is permissible, then, to seek the site of the baptism somewhere considerably farther up the Jordan. Now, in the vicinity of *beisān* there is another *maḥāde*, or ford, called *maḥadet 'abāra*. The striking resemblance of this name with (Beth)abara makes it fairly certain that it represents a typical case of the continuity of old Biblical place names in modern Arabic garb. As *maḥadet 'abāra* is, moreover, situated almost on the confines of Galilee, it claims precedence over *maḥadet ḥajle* as the probable site of the Saviour's baptism.<sup>1</sup>

### *Makhairus*

According to the traditionally Christian view, the arrest and execution of *John the Baptist* by the tetrarch *Herod Antipas* (Matt. 14, Mark 6) took place at *Makhairus* (*Μαχαιροῦς*), where the subsequent feast for prominent citizens was also held. This fortress is identified with the present-day village of *ḥirbet el-mukawwir*, situated on an elevation of the east coast of the Dead Sea.

Now, there is a serious discrepancy between this ecclesiastical tradition and plain historical common sense. By the time of the execution the hostilities between Herod Antipas and Aretas IV had obviously already flared up and the whole territory east of the Jordan depression was firmly under the sway of the Arab king.

What, then, drew Herod Antipas to Makhairus, which was situated in enemy territory? And what authority had he to invite Galilean officials to a feast to be held there?

Ecclesiastic tradition has here probably confused the circumstances of the time of Herod Antipas and those which had prevailed

<sup>1</sup> It is to be admitted that the words of Matt. 3: 5 seemingly contradict this conclusion with their reference to people coming to see John the Baptist »from Jerusalem and all Judea«. Such is not, however the case; the passage only shows that John may have started his activity at *maḥadet ḥajle* and later moved to the neighbourhood of *maḥadet 'abāra*.

under Herod the Great, who had, of course, been in undisputed possession of the place.

We accordingly come to face the task of finding the real scene of the execution of the Baptist, and for accomplishing it we may profitably have recourse to Arabic toponymical tradition.

Antipas had, as is well known, a new castle at Tiberias, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The summit on which it was built was, a quarter of a century ago, still called *kaṣr bint al-malik* (the castle of the king's daughter) by the local Arab population. Calling to mind the special circumstances connected with John's death we see that Tiberias has a much stronger claim to having been its site than Makhairus.

### *Bethsaida*

The ancient *Bethsaida Julias* was situated on the eastern bank of the Jordan, close to the place where the river reaches the Sea of Galilee. Bethsaida (from the Aramaic *bēt šaidā*, «home» or «place of fishing») was given the epithet «Julias» by the tetrarch Philip in honour of the daughter of Emperor Augustus.

John (12: 21) speaks of a «Bethsaida of Galilee» and Mark (6: 45) tells us that Jesus bade the disciples go *εἰς τὸ πέραν πρὸς Βηθσαιδάν*. Epiphanius (Advers. haeres. II, 51, 13) refers to the town as being near Capernaum (i. e., *tell hūm*; see below). These and parallel passages have raised the question whether there was yet another Bethsaida on the Sea of Galilee and, if so, where it was situated.

Seetzen found a «greatly decayed and uninhabited» old inn, called *han bēt šaidā*, on a flat, desolate strip of land on the NW shore of the sea, extending almost to *majdal* (Reisen, IV, p. 168). The *hān* must obviously have lain somewhere in the neighbourhood of (*'ēn*) *eṭ-ṭābeḡā* (Gr. *hepta pēgōn*), and Seetzen's observation conforms to the statement of Epiphanius referred to above. This being so, we may tentatively place the other, hypothetical Bethsaida in the region of *eṭ-ṭābeḡā*.

It might be asked why two localities, both situated near each other on the same sea-shore, should have been given similar names. There would have been nothing unusual in this, as is seen from the existence, in the past, of two different *Sidon's* (Arabic *ṣaidā*) on the Mediterranean coast (the smaller one was probably on the site of the present-day *rās el-busait*). It is noteworthy that the two pairs of names (Bethsaida — Bethsaida Julias and Sidon — Sidon) are both derived from the same root *ṣ-y-d* (fishing, hunting) and emphasize both the same basic idea, viz. the prominence or excellence of local fishing. It stands to reason that Bethsaida (or, rather, both of them) must have been noted for good fishing.

This is, in fact, the case in regard to Bethsaida Julias, whose sandy beaches, being flat-bottomed and without stones, are well adapted for drag-net (*jārūf*, *jarf*) and casting-net (*šabake*) fishing.

But exactly the same can, on the other hand, be said of the shore near *et-ṭābeḡā*, which is also flat and free from stones, thus enabling the fisherman to wade out and throw (*ramā*) his *šabake*.

Near *et-ṭābeḡā* there is a small bay particularly famed for its abundant fish and containing the shrine of *šēḥ 'ali eṣ -ṣayyād*, whom the local fishermen are wont to regard as their patron saint and from whom they often implore aid by certain conventional exclamations when casting out their nets. Since fishing with casting-nets is so easy near *et-ṭābeḡā*, boats have almost completely fallen into disuse.

From all the foregoing we see that the implications of the term *ṣaidā* contained in the name of Bethsaida are admirably met by the conditions prevailing near *et-ṭābeḡā* — decidedly better, in fact, than by any other place on the NW shore of the Sea of Galilee. This, we think, speaks strongly for the view that there were two Bethsaidas by the Sea of Galilee, the one lying on the western shore and the other (or Bethsaida Julias) being situated on the eastern coast of the sea.

*Capernaum, its synagogue and kibla*

The localization of the ancient Capernaum has given rise to two different opinions. One of them maintains that its site is to be found at the present-day *ḥān minye*, whereas the other is in favour of *tell ḥūm*. Various arguments have been advanced in support of both theories.

Christian tradition relating to this problem is almost equally divided in favour of the two hypotheses and may consequently be said, in a sense, to remain neutral.

The main arguments of the rivalling factions are based on circumstances concerning the so-called *via maris*, the spring of Capernaum, and various other data given by Josephus, Jerome, Theodosius, Arculf, Quaresmius, etc. Christian tradition, then, leaves us in the dark as to the real site of Capernaum. On the other hand, both the Jewish and especially the Mohammedan traditions turn the balance in favour of the *tell ḥūm* hypothesis.

The Jewish tradition, it is true, does not unanimously regard *tell ḥūm* as the site of Capernaum. In Rabbinical literature the inhabitants of Capernaum were occasionally referred to as *mīnīm* (heretics, apostates) and *kafr mīnīm* seems to have been used, in Talmudic times, as a nickname for *kafr nahūm*. It has been maintained that the latter part of the name *ḥān minye* is derived from this *mīn*.

This is, however, erroneous, *minye* being not derived from *mīn* but from the Coptic Greek *monē*, meaning villa, hamlet, etc. (ZDPV, IV pp. 194—199). The only argument in favour of the *ḥān minye* hypothesis derived from the Jewish tradition is thus proved untenable. In the same great mass of tradition we find, on the other hand, evidence clearly justifying the identification of Capernaum with *tell ḥūm*.

Rabbinical literature mentions *tanḥūm*, or *kafr tanḥūm*, as being the site of the grave of the prophet *nahūm* or of a certain Rabbi *tanḥūm*, or of both. Modern Jewish tradition asserts that this *kafr tanḥūm* is identical with *kafr nahūm* or Capernaum and that *tell*



*hūm* is simply a later Arabic variant of *tanḥūm*.<sup>1</sup> According to Seetzen (IV, p. 173), moreover, the *tell hūm* of the Arabs was called »*kefar tanḥūm*» by the Jews as late as at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The *tell hūm* hypothesis receives further support from the local Mohammedan tradition, which may be regarded as comparatively disinterested. It is unanimous in identifying *tell hūm* with Capernaum (cf. ZDPV, II, pp. 63—4).<sup>2</sup>

The acceptance of this argument appears to meet an obstacle in the occurrence of *tell* in the name *tell hūm*, since the surface configuration of this region does not warrant its application. A *tell* signifies a roundish mound with slopes, whereas an ancient settlement, with remains of foundations and heaps of building stones, but no mound formation, is called a *ḥirbe*. This differentiation is generally adhered to in Arabic toponymy.

Now, there is no *tell* whatever at *tell hūm*. On the contrary, the ruins lie scattered about on fairly level ground and the character of the locality would readily lend itself to the application of the term *ḥirbe*. This term is, in fact, being used. The Arab fellaheen occasionally do call *tell hūm* by the fuller name of *ḥirbet tanḥūm*. The occurrence of two contradictory topographical terms in one place name is an anachronism for which the explanation can be that the name has evolved from an original form *ḥirbet tanḥūm*.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, philological and traditional evidence combined point to the probability of *tell hūm* having evolved from *kafr tanḥūm*, which was another name for *kafr naḥūm* or Capernaum. This is, further-

<sup>1</sup> *kafr naḥūm* could quite well have survived in Arabic parlance as, e.g., *kefr nūm* or *kefr hūm*. An analogous case is found in the name of *kefr sabt* (a village some 10 kilometers to the SW of Tiberias). The contraction of *naḥūm* to *hūm* is, however, not a probable one.

<sup>2</sup> The tradition prevalent among the Arabs to the effect that *tell hūm* is cursed may be considered as further evidence. Cf. »And thou, Capernaum shalt be brought down to hell», Matt. 11: 23.

<sup>3</sup> The evolution of *n* to *l* is phonetically plausible, as exemplified in the changing of *šūnem* to *sūlem*, and of *dafne* to *difle*.

more, supported by archaeological considerations. It has generally been assumed that the synagogue of Capernaum was erected in the second century A. D. There are, however, certain factors permitting the assumption that it was built at an earlier date.

We have records of the building of many synagogues in the second century, but none among them referring to the construction of a synagogue at Capernaum. A close study of its various parts and especially of the Eastern Annex, built at the time of Constantine, reveals a considerable difference in style between the oldest part, or the one-floor synagogue, and the annexed »Womens Gallery». The former is built of big stones, without any other ornamentation but line decoration, except on the outer door lintels. The upper gallery, on the other hand, is well in tune with the building style of the second century, with many Jewish emblems and ornaments.

The *kibla* also indicates an earlier date for the original synagogue. Initially, the prayers conducted in it were directed towards the North. Later, the walls and interior of the synagogue were rearranged so as to change the *kibla* towards the South, i. e., towards the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. The former, or northern, *kibla* shows that the original synagogue was built before the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70.

#### NOTE

The so-called Wailing Wall of the Jews is the southern part of the western encircling wall of the destroyed temple of Jerusalem. It was built of huge stone blocks by Herod, in connection with his general restoration of the Temple of Solomon. Herod's temple was demolished by Titus in A. D. 70, but at least this high »Wailing Wall» portion of its encircling wall has been well preserved up to the present time.

Some sixty years after the destruction of the Temple, the Jews revolted and did, finally, succeed in forcing the Romans out of Jerusalem, but not later than in A. D. 135 the city was again ravaged by Imperial troops. As no more sacrifices could thereafter be offered

in the Temple and as the Jews were too exhausted for renewed political uprisings, their religious leaders declared that the Holy Scripture and prayers were to replace the sacrifice. The decision was chiefly actuated by the fact that the exact site of the Holiest of Holies in the extensive ruined area could no longer be ascertained with any degree of accuracy. There was no alternative but to have recourse to the words of the Holy Scripture (cf. Ps. 5: 8 and 137: 5; Dan. 6: 10). Prayers *inside the Temple* were henceforward replaced by prayers directed *towards it*.

In the following we shall see that after the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70, and especially after the year 135, the Western Wall occupied the position of the real sanctuary of the Jews and that prayers were directed towards it from all points of the compass. The Jews had, in fact, a special direction, in which they performed their devotions, long before the birth of Islam, although we generally tend to think that this institution (the *kibla*) was established by Mohammed. When starting his efforts at converting the Jews in Arabia, he found it advisable to make certain concessions to them, and this is why he at first accepted Jerusalem as the direction of the *kibla*. We read in the Coran (Surah VII, 1): »Praise be to him who transported his servant from the sacred temple (of Mecca) to the further temple (of Jerusalem), the circuit of which we have blessed.» Up to this time there had been no *kibla* in Arabia, or within Islam, which would have had to be abandoned. But soon the situation changed: Mohammed's efforts to convert the Jews proved futile and he subsequently changed the *kibla* towards Mecca, as seen from Surah II, 163 ff. (». . . they [the Jews] will not follow thy *kibla*, neither shalt thou follow their *kibla*.»). But has the Western Wall ever been the direction of a *kibla*? We are in a position to consider this question when following the travels of Jewish pilgrims to the ruins of the sanctuary. In about A. D. 95 four rabbis journeyed towards Jerusalem; among them were Gamaliel the younger and Akiba. Having reached Mount Scopus, the northern part of the Mount of Olives, they rent their garments, seeing from afar the desolate area of the ruined temple. Passing it, they saw a fox emerging

from the Holiest of Holies. The rabbis had to direct their steps to the west of the sacred ground and, having passed by the Holiest of Holies, they arrived at the present »Wailing Wall» (Talmud Babli, Maccoth 24 b). Further light is shed on the matter by information dating from later times. In Midrash Shemoth Rabba (on Exodus 3: 1) the movement of the *Shechinah* (the presence of God) is discussed and we read there: »The Shechinah has never moved from the Western Wall (*kōtel ma'arābī*), for it is said: 'Behold, he standeth behind our wall.'» (Cant. 2: 9). This passage dates from about A. D. 300. Similar references to the connection between Cant. 2: 9 and the Wailing Wall occasionally occur in various parts of the Rabbinical literature of the years 300—1300 (Yalkut Shimoni, on Cant. 2: 9).

This is also confirmed by reports of Christian pilgrims. The Pilgrim of Bordeaux writes, in about A. D. 333: »In the vicinity of the statue of Hadrian there is a memorial stone, which is visited by the Jews once a year; they lament and sigh, they rend their garments, and depart again.» This is confirmed by Jerome and by Eusebius, the ecclesiastical historian. »The Wall of Tears» remained the spiritual focus of the Jewish world all through the Middle Ages.

There is yet an important topographical factor to be considered: The House of the Council is placed by Josephus on the spot where Arabic tradition puts *el-mehkeme* (i. e., the Court House). We learn from Rabbinical literature that, forty years before the destruction of Jerusalem, the sessions of the Council were transferred from the Temple to this building, still known as the »Court House» (Talm. B., Sanh. 15 a — Ab. Zar. 8 b).

### Classification of Arabic topographical names

Scores of Biblical place names have tenaciously survived through Arabic tradition displaying a remarkable power of resistance against external influences.

Many of them have clung to their original form, notwithstanding their having been, for a time, superseded by other names given by the European conquerors, as, e.g.: *'akkō* — PTOLEMAIS — *'akkā*;

*bēt-še'ān* — SCYTHOPOLIS — *beisān*; *šippōrī* — DIOCAESAREA — *šeffūrie*; *sūsītā* — HIPPOS — *susīye*.

Other place names were preserved by virtue of the idea contained in them, i.e., the basic concept of an ancient name has survived in its present-day Arabic counterpart, even without any »phonetic» tradition whatsoever. E.g.: *hebrōn*, now *el-ḥalīl* (both signify »alliance», »friendship»); *dān*, now (tell) *el-kādī* (both convey the meaning of a »judge»); *libnā*, now (tell) *eš-šafī* (the meaning of both is »white, bright, resplendent»).

A *third* group of toponyms have survived in the form of a kind of euphemistic translation. Thus, wherever in Palestine we find *et-taiyibe* as a place name, we have reason to conjecture that somewhere in the background looms an ancient Biblical name, too closely resembling the Arabic word '*afrit* (demoniacal being). This group includes Hebrew words consisting of the radicals '*fr*, e.g., '*efrōn* (2 Chr. 13: 19); '*ofrā* (Jud. 6: 24).<sup>1</sup>

A *fourth* group consists of place names, which contain Biblical personal names, the original topographical appellations having been superseded by the names of famous personages connected, in one way or another, with the localities themselves. This is illustrated by *Βηθανία*, whose present name *el-'azarīye* has sprung either directly from *Λάζαρος* (the initial *L* having been misconceived as the Arabic article *al-*) or deviously, by way of a regression to the

<sup>1</sup> Also such O.T. names as *ḥēfer* (Josh. 12: 17), *ḥafārayim* (Josh. 19: 19) have been changed into the euphemistic *et-taiyibe*. The explanation of this is that the *ḥēt* in the old name was changed into '*ayin*, as in many other cases, especially near *rēš*, e.g.: *bēt-ḥōrōn* (Josh. 16: 5) — *bēt 'ūr*; *anaḥarāt* (Josh. 19: 19) — *en-na'ūra*. The phenomenon was observed already by G. A. Wallin (ZDMG, IX, 46). Also the '*Eφραϊμ* which Jesus chose as his last resort to rest with his disciples near the desert (Jn. 11: 54) must be derived from the same root as '*efrōn* — '*ofrā* (with '*ayin*). The tradition of the LXX shows with the form *Γοφραϊμ* which occurs in many trustworthy manuscripts, that the radicals were '*fr*. The Arabic antipathy against the '*fr* owing to the demon '*afrit* was of course not yet known in the time of Jesus. The village was called '*afra* as late as 1890 (ZDPV 1894 p. 65). In this neighbourhood the O.T. *ba'al ḥāšōr* is still preserved in the form *ḥazzūr* (PJB 1928, p. 14).

Semitic (Hebrew) *el'āzār*, which is the origin of *Αάζαρος*. Another instance is the *ķirjat-je'ārīm* of Biblical times (Josh. 9: 17; I Sam. 6: 21 etc.). According to I Sam. 7: 1 a certain *el'āzār* was a guardian of the Ark of Covenant there, and his name has been preserved in *dēr el-'azhar* (a part of its modern site). This brings us clearly the remarkable tenacity of personal names in Palestinian toponymy.<sup>1</sup>

There is also a *fifth* large group of toponyms which do not contain any personal names but whose identification is supported by their *walī* or *ķubbe*. We read in Judges (2: 9) about the burial of Joshua, the son of Nun: »And they buried him in Timnath-heres». There is South of Nablus a village called *kafr hārīs* (cf. Hebrew *timnat-heres*) which preserves the latter part of the Hebrew name. The saint of the village is *nebi nūn*, i.e. the father of Joshua.

A *sixth* group consists of anachronistic toponyms, which the present day Arabs are not able to account for. All these Arabic names have in common the fact that they stress certain features (e.g., economical or religious) which have been prominent and conspicuous in each locality in the days past. In the following we present examples of names of an *economical* nature. There is a place called *ķirbet nahas* (copper ruin) about 30 km. South of the Dead Sea. Glueck in his book »The other Side of the Jordan» writes about it: »Repeated questions elicited no sensible replies from our Arab guides as to why the site was called by that particular name. They were well aware of its presence, knew indeed that the place contained an ancient ruin, but had no idea whatsoever with regard to the origin of the name, except to repeat over and over again that it had been called so by their fathers. It must not be concluded that our Arab guides were by any means stupid . . . They knew

<sup>1</sup> This locality was also known (Josh. 15: 6) by another name: *ķiryat ba'al* (sc. *'ēnāb*, supported by the Egyptian *ķart-enbu*). All the three parts of this name, meaning »the village of the *ba'al* of the grapes», have survived separately in modern Arabic, in the following forms: *el-ķarya*, *ba'la* (10th century) and *ķaryat el-'inab*. All these separate names are like three threads pointing in the same direction, i.e., to help the identification of *ķirjat-je'arīm* with the present *el-ķarya*.

the desert like a book . . . They simply had not learned how to evaluate the small, seemingly insignificant archaeocological data, which to the initiated meant as much as data dealing with trails and desert life meant to the Arab. For that matter, similar archaeological data have been completely passed over by western scholars who were not trained to perceive them, or to evaluate them even if brought to their attention». (pp. 57—59).

There was a Jewish settlement NE of Nazareth, known for its dyeing industry in Roman times (Asochis).<sup>1</sup> Today the locality is nothing but an ordinary field with scattered potsherds. It is called by the Arabs *ħirbet el-lōn*, ruin of colour. The southern beach of the sea of Galilee is called »the place of salt», and a village is called *samak*, »fish», cf. above Bet-Yerah, Tarichea.

In the following we present examples of names of a *religious* or *political* nature.

The tendency of ancient Palestinian place names to survive, by all the vicissitudes and upheavals of history, is well illustrated by the antecedents of the present-day name *bēt-er-rās*. The locality so designated is situated at some 30 kilometres SE from the Sea of Galilee and is, in all probability, identical with the ancient *b<sup>2</sup>‘ešt<sup>2</sup>rā*, sc. *bēt-‘ešterā* (the house, temple, of Astarte Josh. 21: 27). Finding here a flourishing centre for the cult of Astarte, the Romans were induced to call the place Capitolias, as a »capital» of the goddess (cf. the analogy Capitulum—Juppiter). In due time, the Latin name was superseded by a new appellation in the Arabic vernacular: *bēt er-rās*. The former part represents a direct reversion to the original Hebrew *bayit*, whereas the element *er-rās* is derived from the caput idea contained in Capitolias. Thus, both formal and cultural associations of the original name *bēt-‘ešterā* have survived with remarkable obduracy in the name of *bēt er-rās* up to the present day.

We find a comparable case in the area of the village *bittir* some 10 kilometres SW of Jerusalem, where the ruins are called *ħirbet*

<sup>1</sup> Saarisalo, *Topographical Researches in Galilee*, JPOS, 9, 10 (1929—30).

*el-yehūd* by the Arabs, although no Jewish settlement has been known to exist in the area for centuries. This discrepancy is explained by the fact that at the time of the Bar Kochba rebellion (135 A.D.) a Jewish stronghold was situated here, the name *ḥirbet el-yehūd* having survived from those distant days as a vague remembrance of the stronghold's stiff stand against the Romans.

A *seventh* group consists of topographical names of popular etymology, which adapts Hebrew names so as to endow them with familiar Arabic sounds and, wherever possible, a familiar meaning as well.

This is the case of the modern *'īd el-mā*, »fête of water«, in the vicinity of *bēt jibrīn* (Eleutheropolis). The name *'īd el-mā* is derived from the Biblical *'adullām* (1 Sam. 22: 1, 2 Sam. 5: 7), which Christian tradition has identified with a locality near Bethlehem.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, the ancient *Μαχαροῦς* (see above) is now Arabic *ḥirbet el-mukawwir*. The word *el-mukawwir* — »the person who winds the turban around (the head)« may be an allusion to the steep hilltop of the locality.

In contradistinction to the above group cases such as *eṭ-ṭābeḡā* < Gr. *hepta pēgōn* (seven springs, cf. p. 14) fall into a special group. Here the Arabic form has no meaning.

<sup>1</sup> Saarisalo, *Topographical Researches in the Shephelah*, JPOS, 11 (1931).