

## THE ANCIENT CITY OF PHILOTERIA (*BETH YERAH*)

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(JERUSALEM)

ON the western shore of the Sea of Chinnereth, at the southern end, in a striking situation, at the very mouth of the Jordan,<sup>1</sup> is found a large mound, whose extent and character point to the former existence here of an important town. The narrow pass along the lake-shore widens out into a small plain at this point. The nearness of the Lake and the Jordan, with their abundance of fish, and the fertile plain of the Jordan, which begins here, furnished

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<sup>1</sup> With regard to the mouth of the Jordan at Chinnereth, it is interesting to note the description given by the Russian pilgrim, Abbot Daniel, who visited Palestine in the year 1106 (Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society, *Pilgrimage of the Russian Abbot Daniel*, p. 60): "The Jordan flows from the Sea of Tiberias in two streams, which foam along in a marvellous way; one of these is called *Jor* and the other *Dan*. Thus the Jordan flows from the Sea of Tiberias in two streams, which are three bow-shots apart, and which, after a separation of about half a verst, reunite as one river, which is called Jordan from the names of the two arms —. At the source fish abound, and there two stone bridges, very solidly built upon arches through which the Jordan flows, span the two streams." Daniel, as he was traveling northward from Beisân, seems to have seen the Jarmuk and erroneously taken it for an arm of the Jordan. The two bridges which he saw were presumably the *Jisr el-Majâmi'* and the *Jisr es-Sidd*, now ruined, near the modern Jewish colony of Betania. Since the distances do not agree at all with the facts, the good abbot evidently drew upon his imagination for details. I cannot therefore agree with Dalman, who in *Orte und Wege Jesu*<sup>2</sup>, p. 159, says that in the time of Daniel the Jordan flowed out of the lake in two streams, which encircled Khirbet Kerak. Such a unique position of the town, situated on an island, would certainly be mentioned somewhere in the literature, but of this there is no trace. What Dalman took to be the ancient bed of the northern arm of the Jordan is only an insignificant depression, through which water flows during inundations. The wall which crosses this depression has no arches, which would be necessary in case the water really flowed here in ancient times. Daniel's stone bridges were, according to his express statement, built upon arches.

opportunity for the development of a large settlement. The road from the north to Scythopolis (Beth-shan) passed by the ancient city. Accordingly, we are not surprised to find there extensive traces of an ancient city. The ruins extend for a kilometer along the lake-shore, and the remains of an ancient wall, of buildings projecting above the surface of the ground, of basalt pillars, rock-hewn tombs, the remains of an aqueduct which brought water to the city from the Wâdi Fejjâs, etc. prove conclusively that a large and important town was located here. We can hardly be wrong in asserting that this is the site of the most important ancient town on the western shore of the Sea, with the exception of Tiberias, which was founded at a later period. The Arabs call the mound Khirbet Kerak ("ruins of the fortress"); at present it is included within the territory belonging to the Jewish colony of Chinnereth.

What was the ancient town whose remains are found here? Unfortunately, the majority of Palestinian topographers have identified it with ancient Taricheae, mentioned frequently by Josephus in connection with the Jewish war against the Romans. For decades a violent dispute raged in regard to the site of Taricheae. There were many who stubbornly maintained the identification of Taricheae with Khirbet Kerak, although every impartial reader of Josephus (who is the only one to be considered, since Pliny wrote from second and third hand) sees at once from his descriptions that Taricheae must have been located north of Tiberias.<sup>1</sup> Finally Professor Dalman has given up the identification of Taricheae with Khirbet Kerak, which he had long accepted, along with most scholars.<sup>2</sup> Dr. Albright will publish in the second volume of the *Annuaire* of the American School an elaborate résumé of the controversy, with a defence of the Mejdél theory, which we may now regard as absolutely certain.

It is therefore possible to state positively that Khirbet Kerak was not the site of Taricheae. Let us then try to reconstruct the history of the place, and discover its ancient name from the literary sources. Neubauer was the first to identify the site with Beth Yerah, mentioned in the Talmud in connection with the Jordan Valley.<sup>3</sup> The Talmud says that the Jordan, or better, the valley of the Jordan begins

<sup>1</sup> See *Bell. Jud.* II 20, 6; 21, 3; III, 10, 1; 10, 3; 10, 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Orte und Wege Jesu*<sup>2</sup>, p. 160.

<sup>3</sup> *La géographie du Talmud*, pp. 31, 215.

south of Beth Yerah: אֵין יֵרֵחַ אֵלֵא מִבֵּית־יֵרֵחַ וְלִמְמָה (*Bekhôrôt* 55 a). This statement and other passages of the Talmud, where Beth Yerah and Sinnabris (the Şinnabrah of the Arabic geographers, and modern Sinnabrah or Sinn en-Nabrah) are mentioned together show clearly that Khirbet Kerak is Beth Yerah.

The name Beth Yerah ("House of the moon") points to a pre-Israelite origin; it is also found in the Amarna Tablets as the name of a town near Byblos (Bit-arḥa). At the southern end of the same valley in which Beth Yerah is situated we find another Canaanite town with a name of similar import—Jericho (יריחו). During the time of the Second Temple, up until the Maccabaeen period, Beth Yerah, like the rest of Galilee, remained outside the narrow Jewish boundaries. We may assume that the population of Beth Yerah was a mixture of Aramaeans and Canaanites or Phoenicians, with a small Jewish element. The world-conqueror, Alexander of Macedon, who cherished the desire of spreading Greek culture over his wide realm, found in this region a fertile field for his activities. While the little people of the Jews showed bitter hostility toward the Hellenizing plans of the Greek kings, the influence of Greek culture spread rapidly in northern Palestine and Transjordan. At that time were laid the foundations of the Hellenistic cities which remained as thorns in the flesh of Jewry during the course of centuries. The Egyptian kingdom of the Ptolemies, to whose lot Palestine fell, exerted a great influence in the direction of Hellenizing the country. Many cities gave up their native names and took new Greek ones. The new name which Beth Yerah assumed is found in a passage of Polybius, who wrote in the second century B. C. He describes the campaign of Antiochus the Great in Palestine in 216, and mentions Philoteria in the following words (Polybius, V, 70, Shuckburgh's translation): He (Antiochus) therefore broke up his camp again and continued his march (from Sidon) towards Philoteria: ordering Diognetus, his navarch, to sail back with his ships to Tyre. Now Philoteria is situated right upon the shores of the lake into which the river Jordan discharges itself, and from which it issues out again into the plains surrounding Scythopolis. The surrender of these two cities to him encouraged him to prosecute his further designs; because the country subject to them was easily able to supply his whole army with provisions and everything necessary for the campaign in abundance.

The name "Philoteria," which is also found in Egypt, was, as it seems, given to the city in order to flatter Ptolemy Philadelphus,



Fig. 1. Head of Tyche.

whose sister was called Philoteria.<sup>1</sup> So, also, Rabbath Ammon changed its name to Philadelphia during his reign.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I do not know why Dalman (*loc. cit.*) calls Philoteria "eine mazedonische Gründung." It is much more probable that the old town, Beth Yerah, simply changed its name, adopting the new Greek name to please its Ptolemaic suzerain. Cf. Strabo, XVI, iv, 5.

<sup>2</sup> That Philadelphia remained an Aramaean town, in spite of its new Greek varnish, is shown by the Gerza Papyri; cf. Vincent, *Revue Biblique*, 1920, p. 189.

Meanwhile the small Jewish state gained in strength as a result of the national movement under the Asmonaeans, and began to extend



Fig. 2. Head of Tyche.

its boundaries in all directions. The Maccabaeian conqueror, Alexander Jannaeus, conquered Galilee in the course of his reign; among the cities which a late Byzantine compiler, George Syncellus, evidently using an ancient source, includes among his conquests is Philoteria. Jannaeus tried to strengthen Judaism by settling Jews in the Hellenistic cities, but these efforts were soon frustrated by the Roman conquest. The Romans gave autonomy to all the Hellenistic cities,



and under their rule, other similar towns were founded, while older cities took Greek or Roman names. Beside Beth Yerah, whose Greek name seems by this time to have fallen into disuse, there was founded another Hellenistic town with the name of Sinnabris, or Sennabris.<sup>1</sup> The Hellenistic cities did not participate in the wars between the Jews and the Romans, and Josephus relates that when Vespasian led his army from Scythopolis to subdue the rebels in Tiberias and Taricheae he pitched his camp at Sennabris,<sup>2</sup> which with its sister town, Beth Yerah, remained friendly to the Romans. Josephus mentions Sennabris, but omits the Hebrew name of the adjoining town.

In the Talmudic literature, Beth Yerah and Sennabris are mentioned several times in connection with the name "Chinnereth" of the Bible; with reference to Deut. 3 17, "From Chinnereth to the Sea of the Arabah," Rabbi Eleazar explained Chinnereth as "Yerah," and R. Samuel as "Beth Yerah," while R. Judah son of R. Simon identified it with Sennabris (Sinnabrai) and Beth Yerah together. R. Levi said that Chinnereth referred to the boundary of Beth-shan.<sup>3</sup>

In another passage of the Jerusalem Talmud we have: "R. Levi asked: In Joshua it is written, and from the plain to the sea of Chinneroth (pl.). Were there two Gennesarets? No, there were two autonomous cities (אבטוניות) like Beth Yerah and Sennabris (צנבריי) and the walled city (כרך) was ruined and became heathen."<sup>4</sup>

From the first passage it appears that both places were mentioned in close connection with Beth-shan. We find the same thing in

<sup>1</sup> The name is Semitic; the forms *Sinnabrî* and *Şinnabrî* are doublets of a type frequently found when there is a צ and a ר in the same word; owing to partial assimilation. The etymon is obscure; one thinks of Heb. *senappîr*, „fin," but the name is more probably derived from the stem צנר, with a compensatory nasalization: cf. Ar. *şabbârah*, "rugged tract covered with fragments of basalt" (W. F. A.).

<sup>2</sup> *Bell. Jud.* III, 9, 7. This is the clearest proof that Taricheae was not Khirbet Kerak, since Vespasian could not have camped under the very walls of the former without some mention of the fact being made by Josephus. If the identification were correct, the passage in Josephus would become wholly unintelligible.

<sup>3</sup> *Ber. Rabba*, 98, 18: שמואל ר' אומר ירח; ר' אליעזר אומר ירח; ר' שמואל ר' אומר בית ירח; ר' יהודה בר' סימון אומר סנבראי ובית ירח. אומר ר' לוי על ההיא: תחום בית שאן ושמה כנרת.

<sup>4</sup> *Jer. Megillah*, 2a: והכתוב "והערבה עד ים כנרת" — מעתה שני גוניסריות — וחבר הכרך ונעשה של גוים היו, או לא היו אלא שני אבטוניות כגון בית ירח וצנבריי — וחבר הכרך ונעשה של גוים.

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The second passage shows that the two sister-cities Beth Yerah and Sennabris were designated as autonomous cities. Now in the Talmud the terms *אבטוניות* and *אבטליות* are always used to denote Hellenistic cities, corresponding to the Greek terms *αὐτόνομοι* and *αὐτοτελείς*.<sup>1</sup>

In other passages Beth Yerah appears as Yerah and Ariaḥ; the environs of Ariaḥ (*תחום אריח*) are specially mentioned, which is otherwise only the case when a town is of some importance. In the neighborhood are also mentioned such places as the Gubâtâ d'Ariaḥ and the Hammât Ariaḥ. Apparently the hot springs of Tiberias were mentioned in connection with Ariaḥ before the founding of the Hellenistic Tiberias.<sup>2</sup>

The Romans fortified Beth Yerah, and the importance of the place as a fortress outlasted its significance otherwise, so the Aramaean population called it simply *Kerâkh*, "fortress," (see above), whence the modern Arabic name *Kerak* is derived. That this conclusion is correct is proved by the fact that the Talmud employs *Kerâkh* as a name of the place.

In connection with Sennabris the Arabic historians describe the defeat of Baldwin I in 1113. On his march to reconquer Jerusalem from the Crusaders Saladin encamped at Sennabris (Sinnabrah).

At the close of the summer of 1921 I was invited by the Commission for Educational Work among the Jewish Laborers in Palestine to deliver some lectures on the Sea of Galilee and its surroundings before the agricultural coöperative societies and the Jewish pioneers who were building the road between Semakh and Tâbghah. I arrived at Chinnereth while they were engaged in road-construction near Khirbet Kerak. Since the road grazed the edge of the tell I had an opportunity to examine the débris, and discovered pot-sherds of the Arabic, Roman-Byzantine, and earlier periods. Some of these fragments are now in the rooms of the coöperative society in Chinnereth. I also found fragments of Greek and Arabic inscriptions, and a Jewish tomb-stone of a later period. The most interesting

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find is a marble head of a Greek Tyche, or Fortune, of the first centuries A. D., which points again to a Hellenistic settlement here. It would be most desirable to have an archaeological society take up the task of excavating Khirbet Kerak. In this way only will it be possible to know whether the ancient Canaanite town of Chinnereth is buried under the débris of the later Beth Yerah or Philoteria.

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(Mr. Sukenik has secured several fragmentary inscriptions from Khirbet Kerak, which are appended here. First there is a very

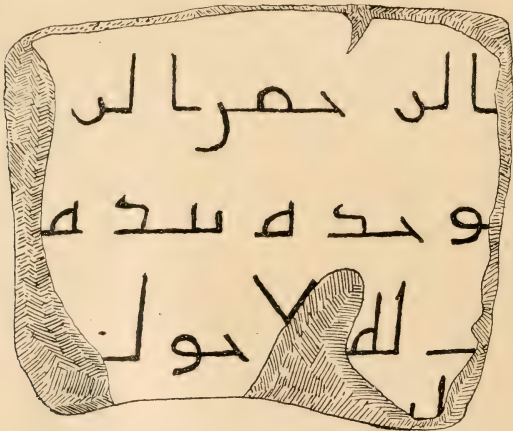


Fig. 3. Kufic inscription from Khirbet Kerak.

archaic Kufic inscription, which, as Dr. Mayer assures me, must date back to the first or second centuries of the Hijrah. The present fragment measures  $16 \times 14 \times 5$  cm., but the original text was about 40 cm. long, and at least 20 cm. wide. Unfortunately only the pious introductory formula has survived, but another fragment may turn up. The stone is marble. I have to thank my friend 'Omar Effendi for assistance in establishing the exact formula employed.

[بسم الله] الرحمن الرحيم [رحيم]  
 [الحمد لله] وحده نيده [الملك]  
 [لا شريك] له لا حول [ولا قوة]  
 [الا به]

"In the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful,  
Praise be to God, the only One, in Whose hands is the dominion;  
He has no companion; there is no might nor power  
Except in Him . . ."

A fragment of a marble inscription, which probably once was inserted in an ornamental frieze above a door, runs as follows:

[ . . . το]ῦ οἴκου δ[. . .]

From Beth Gan, a small Jewish colony south of Yemma, and a few miles southwest of Chinnereth, there comes this fragment of a tomb inscription, copied from a good photograph.

[Ἐνθάδε κείται (?) Μαθ]θαίου[s . . .]

[ ]ὁ ἀρχ[ιμανδρίτης (?)]

[ ]θελ μ[ ]

[ ]ἔτου[s . . .]

["Here lies (?)] Matthew [ ] the arch[imandrite (or archdeacon, etc.) . . .] [who lived . . .] years [ ]" — W. F. A.)