

As-Sinnabra^{*}

L. A. MAYER

Hebrew University, Jerusalem

FOR a description of Palestine under Muslim rule, based on Arab sources, we have to rely mainly on the work of three great orientalists, Gildemeister,¹ Le Strange,² and Myednikoff.³ The first two used almost exclusively geographical material, while Myednikoff, who devoted the first volume of his book to the history of Palestine, kept his historical and geographical sources apart, and in his last three volumes—dealing with the historical geography of this country—added very little to Le Strange's work. This separation was an obvious methodical mistake since a great deal of purely geographical material can be found in chronicles or manuals for the use of chancery officials. On the other hand, information about historical events often helps to visualize a site. Consequently—with the assistance of the younger members of the School of Oriental Studies of the Hebrew University⁴—I have begun to collect all the Arabic material, printed and manuscript, without distinguishing between chronicles, travellers, geographers, or encyclopaedists, with the purpose of collecting as many data as possible about the towns, fortresses and villages in Palestine from the Arab conquest until the downfall of the Mamluks. A comprehensive introduction will include a description of the political, administrative and economic order of Palestine, and all such other aspects of cultural life as cannot be fitted into the topographical framework of the book.

The progress of the work has been greatly slowed down by the second World War, and, now that we have no access to our library on Mt. Scopus, it has ceased

* This article was first published in Hebrew, almost exactly as it is presented here, in *Eretz Israel*, Annual of the Israel Exploration Society, 1, 1951, p. 169 f., dedicated to Professor M. Schwabe on the occasion of his sixtieth anniversary.

¹ Gildemeister, J.: Beiträge zur Palästinakunde aus arabischen Quellen, *Zeitschr. Deutsch. Paläst. Ver.*, 4, 1881, pp. 85-92; 6, 1883, pp. 1-12; 7, 1884, pp. 215-230.

² Le Strange, G.: *Palestine under the Moslems*. London, 1890.

³ Myednikoff, N. A.: *Palestina po arabskim istochnikam*. St. Petersburg, 1897-1903.

⁴ They are: Mrs. Gertrud Mélamède, Mr. Uri Ben-Horin, Mr. Alexander Dothan, Mr. Asher Goren, Dr. Uriel Heyd, Mr. Shim'on Landman and Dr. Abraham N. Poliak. I should like to thank them once more for their assistance.

altogether. It may be worth while, however, already at this stage, to publish a specimen of the 500 articles of the planned book, in order to invite criticism. At the same time it may serve as comparison with the work of my predecessors. Le Strange, for instance, describes aş-Şinnabra, the subject of this article, on the basis of one passage from Yâqût⁵ (quoting also *Marâşid*, II, p. 168, where it was copied), and two references, one to a "bridge over the Jordan south of the lower end of the Lake of Tiberias"⁶ and another to a great bridge "beyond the lower end of the Lake of Tiberias".⁷ The sources which he quotes do not call it Jisr aş-Şinnabra, but it may—or may not—be the same bridge. In the following lines, the reader will find fifteen Arabic references to the palace or village of aş-Şinnabra, and seven to its bridge.

Aş-Şinnabra,⁸ in Hebrew and Aramaic sources סנבראי, צינבריי, צנבראי,⁹ Σένναβρις in Josephus,¹⁰ Sane Boria¹¹ and Casale Sembra¹² of the Crusaders,

⁵ *Op. laud.*, p. 531.

⁶ *Op. laud.*, p. 52.

⁷ *Op. laud.*, p. 335.

⁸ This is the correct Arabic spelling, as pointed out by W. F. Albright: Contributions to the historical geography of Palestine, *Ann. Amer. Schools Orient. Res.*, 2 & 3, 1921-22 (publ. 1923), p. 36, nn. 22, 24. The form Sinn en-Nabra is first found in H. H. Kitchener's Reports (in *Quart. Stat. Palest. Explor. Fund*, 1878, p. 14): 'From Zerín I sent an expedition to Tiberias to inquire after the name Sinn en-Nabiâ . . . The name was found to be well known.' Nabiâ here is obviously a printer's error for Nabra. As a result, the name appeared in the same form (Sinn-en-Nâbra) in 1881, in *The Survey of Western Palestine*, Mem. I, p. 370, and also on the map of the Palestine Exploration Fund, and was translated 'the tooth of eminence' (*Arabic and English Name Lists*, p. 134). It was taken over from Kitchener by various scholars, such as K. Furrer: Die Ortschaften am See Genezareth, *Zeitschr. Deutsch. Paläst. Ver.*, 2, 1879, p. 53; E. W. G. Masterman: *Studies in Galilee*, 1909, p. 31; R. Dussaud: *Topographie historique de la Syrie antique et médiévale*, 1927, p. 389, carte I, C. 3, and others. However, some doubts were voiced, even at an early date, for instance A. Frei: Beobachtungen vom See Genezareth, *Zeitschr. Deutsch. Paläst. Ver.*, 9, 1886, p. 141: 'In dieser Gegend müsste Sennabris sich befinden, und man will diesen Hügel Sinn en-Nabra bezeichnen gehört haben. Ich erkundigte mich umsonst nach diesem Namen. Niemand wusste etwas davon.' Saarisalo, *Boundaries*, p. 81, mentions that the site is 'more frequently' called Mallâḥah. The editors of the *Name Lists* were apparently caught in the trap of popular etymology here, as occasionally elsewhere.

In Arabic texts the place is sometimes called 'aş-Şannîra' (e.g. Ibn Faḍl Allah, *Masâlik al-Abṣâr*, p. 82, l. 10); or 'aş-Şîra' (e.g. Sibṭ ibn al-Jauzî, *Mir'ât az-Zamân*, ed. Jewett, p. 25, l. 2; Ibn 'Asâkir, *at-Ta'rikh al-Kabîr*, vol. III, pp. 443, l. 19, 444, l. 3; as-Sûyufî, *Husn al-Mubâdara*, Cairo 1327, vol. I, p. 97, ult.); or 'aş-Şabra' (e.g. Ibn al-Athîr, vol. V, p. 223, l. 1 f.), and even 'aş-Şumaira' (al-Mas'ûdî, *Murûj adh-Dhabab*, vol. V, p. 205, l. 7). All these are obvious printers' errors or mistakes of copyists.

⁹ Cf. *Sepher Hayishuv*, I, Jerusalem, 1939, p. 130, s.v.; Avi-Yonah, M.: *Historical Geography of Palestine* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1949, p. 127, n. 11 (with references to Josephus and some recent studies).

¹⁰ *Bellum Judaicum*, III, 9, 7 (=447); IV, 8, 2 (=455), though the passages quoted have Ἐνναβρις and Γυνναβρις (ed. Niese). One of these is certainly a scribe's error. In his edition of Josephus in *The Loeb Classical Library*, Thackeray corrects Ἐνναβρις to Σένναβρις.

¹¹ Cf. Röhricht, R.: Studien zur mittelalterlichen Geographie und Topographie Syriens, *Zeitschr. Deutsch. Paläst. Ver.*, 10, 1887, p. 234, n. 4.

¹² R. Röhricht, *Regesta*, No. 983, p. 259. I owe this reference to the kindness of my friend and colleague Dr. J. Prawer.

was "a place in the Jordan district (al-Urdunn), opposite 'Aqabat Afîq (the Pass of Afîq), a distance of three miles from Tiberias".¹³ "Mu'âwiya used to spend the winter there".¹⁴ Similarly, "(the caliph) 'Abd al-Malik used to spend the winter in aş-Şinnabra which is in the Jordan district. At winter's end, he would camp at al-Jâbiya, and order his companions to camp, and present each with sheep according to his rank. A few days after the beginning of the month of March (*adhâr*), he was wont to enter Damascus . . . and when the cold became more severe, he would proceed to aş-Şinnabra."¹⁵

Other caliphs of the Umayyad dynasty made use of this place at times, and several political events took place here. Thus, the caliph Marwân b. al-Ḥakam stayed here in the year 64 A. H. (683/4) on his way from Egypt to Damascus, and here various complaints were brought before him.¹⁶ In 65 A. H. "on his return from Egypt" this caliph made his followers "swear the oath of allegiance to his sons 'Abd al-Malik and 'Abd al-Azîz (as his heirs) in aş-Şinnabra or in Damascus; and he appointed 'Abd al-Malik as governor of Palestine."¹⁷ Ya'qûbî describes the same event and adds the following details: "When Marwân, on his way from Egypt, reached aş-Şinnabra which is in the Jordan district, he learned that Ḥassân b. Baḥdal had sworn an oath of allegiance to 'Amr b. Sa'îd. He had him brought before him and told him: I have learned that you have sworn allegiance to 'Amr b. Sa'îd. He denied it. (Marwân) said to him: Swear an oath of allegiance to 'Abd al-Malik (as heir apparent). And he swore (an oath of allegiance) to 'Abd al-Malik and to 'Abd al-Azîz b. Marwân after him. And Marwân did not leave aş-Şinnabra until he died."¹⁸

According to a tradition "Umayya b. 'Abd Allah b. Khâlid b. Asîd passed away at aş-Şinnabra which is in the Jordan district"¹⁹ in the reign of 'Abd al-Malik. In the year 126 A. H. (744) "when the (rebellious) men of Palestine and the Jordan-district scattered, Sulaimân (b. Hishâm, commander of the

¹³ Yâqût, *Mu'jam al-Buldân*, vol. III, p. 419, l. 9 f.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, l. 10 f.

¹⁵ Al-Balâdhurî, *Ansâb al-Asbrâf*, ed. Ahlwardt, p. 200, ll. 11-16.

¹⁶ Al-Balâdhurî, *Ansâb al-Asbrâf*, ed. Goitein, vol. V, p. 149, l. 20 f.

¹⁷ Al-Balâdhurî, *Ansâb al-Asbrâf*, ed. Ahlwardt, p. 164, l. 15 - p. 165, l. 1.

¹⁸ *Târikh*, vol. II, p. 306, ll. 16-20. On p. 307, ll. 4-6, however, al-Ya'qûbî mentions the fact that Marwân died in Damascus, in Ramaḍân of the year 65 A.H. The original information that Marwân died in aş-Şinnabra is also quoted by Ibn 'Asâkir, *at-Ta'rikh al-Kabîr*, and from there by Ibn Kathîr, *al-Bidâya wa-n-Nihâya*, vol. III, p. 260, l. 14, and as-Suyûtî, *Ḥusn al-Mubâḍara*, vol. I, p. 97, ult. These authors are, however, also aware of other traditions. A slightly different version of the above story is told by al-Mas'ûdî, *Murûj adh-Dhabab*, vol. V, p. 205.

¹⁹ Al-Balâdhurî, *Ansâb al-Asbrâf*, ed. Ahlwardt, p. 224, ll. 11-13.

caliph's army) set out until he reached aṣ-Ṣinnabra. And the people of the Jordan (district) came to him, and swore an oath of allegiance to (the caliph) Yazîd b. al-Walîd . . . When Sulaimân camped at aṣ-Ṣinnabra, he sent me (says the narrator, 'Uthmân b. Dâûd) to Yazîd b. al-Walîd".²⁰

With the disappearance of the Umayyad dynasty from the historical scene, aṣ-Ṣinnabra ceased to be a palace. The site was inhabited, however, and the village of aṣ-Ṣinnabra continues to be mentioned in various sources during the following few centuries.²¹ The village is referred to several times in connection with the wars between the Muslims and the Franks. For instance, on the eve of the battle of Ḥiṭṭîn, on the 17th Rabî' the Second 583 A. H. (26 June 1187) "(Ṣalâḥ ad-dîn) went (from the other side of the Jordan to meet the Crusaders who stood near Sepphoris) and camped that day near the Sea of Galilee in the vicinity of a village called aṣ-Ṣinnabra".²² At some date which cannot be definitely established, but which is certainly not later than the Ayyubid period, aṣ-Ṣinnabra ceased to be occupied, and henceforth only the bridge opposite the village appears in the texts.

This bridge, Jisr aṣ-Ṣinnabra, seems to have been a well known landmark in the district. Ibn al-Bayṭâr (died 1248) mentions it in defining the region in which the milfoil (*ḥazanbal*) grows.²³ Ibn al-Qalânisi²⁴ refers to the bridge at the beginning of his account of the battle between Ṭughtakîn of Damascus and Maudûd of Mosul against King Baldwin and the lords of Antioch and of Tripoli, on the 11th Muḥarram 507 A. H. (28 June 1113), when the Franks "agreed to encamp to westward of the Bridge of aṣ-Ṣinnabra". Sibṭ ibn al-Jauzî,²⁵ in describing the same event, is less precise: "Baldwin gathered together (his army) and camped at the Bridge of aṣ-Ṣinnabra". Ibn Faḍl Allah,²⁶ in the first half of the 14th century, describes the junction of the northern and southern Jordan, and continues, "and together they reach the Bridge of aṣ-Ṣinnabra (and then flow) to al-Jisr al-'Âdilî (the Bridge of al-'Âdil) which is below the 'Aqabat Fîq, near ad-Dair al-Aswad (The Black Monastery)". At the beginning of the

²⁰ Ṭabarî, *Annales*, 2nd ser., vol. III, p. 1833, ll. 9 f., 14 f., quoted also by Ibn al-Athîr, vol. V, p. 223, l. 1 f.

²¹ Cf. e. g. Yahyâ b. Sa'îd (in *Scriptores Arabici*, ser. III, t. VII, Beyrouth, 1909), p. 159, l. ult.

²² Ibn Shaddâd, *Sîrat Ṣalâḥ ad-dîn*, Cairo, s.d., p. 61, l. 5 f. (in *Recueil des Historiens des Croisades, Hist. Orient.*, Part III, p. 93), quoted also by Abû Shâma, *Kitâb ar-Raudatâin*, vol. II, p. 81, l. 1.

²³ *Al-Jâmi' li-mufradât*, Bulâq, 1291 A. H. (1875), part II, p. 20, l. 8 b.

²⁴ *Dhail T'drîkh Dimashq*, p. 185, l. 2 (in H. A. R. Gibb's translation, *The Damascus Chronicle of the Crusades*, p. 134).

²⁵ *Mir'ât az-Zamân*, ed. Jewett, p. 25, l. 1 f., recorded under the events of the year 505 A.H. (in *Recueil, vol. laud.*, p. 546, s.a. 506).

²⁶ *Masâlik al-Abṣâr*, p. 82, l. 10.

15th century, the bridge still seems to have been known under this name, for Qalqashandî,²⁷ when determining the boundaries of the Safad district, quotes Ibn Faḍl Allah without any further explanation: "He said in (his book) *at-Ta'rif*.²⁸ And its southern boundary is the Jordan Valley (al-Ghaur) at the Bridge of aş-Şinnabra beyond Tiberias."

²⁷ *Şubḥ al-A'shâ*, vol. IV, p. 150, l. 12 f.; *Daw' aş-Şubḥ*, p. 305, l. 17.

²⁸ *Ta'rif*, Cairo, 1312 A.H., p. 182, l. 13.