

Isthmus. There were also a celebrated grove of pines, and a multitude of statues representing victors in the Isthmian Games. These were among the most frequented and ancient of the Greek contests, and were held in alternate years at the stadium outside the sanctuary walls, and at the theatre to the west of it. Corinth controlled the Games and the presidency of them was a coveted honour among its citizens. Between the sanctuary and Schoenus ran the Diolcus, the concrete trackway about four miles long which crossed the Isthmus. Along this not only goods for transshipment but ships themselves up to a certain size were hauled from sea to sea, to avoid the dangerous voyage round Cape Melea. The *fact* is indisputable, but the method is not certain. It seems likely that the vessel was floated into some sort of cradle that had wheels under it and that this was drawn by a large team of oxen across the Isthmus, which is here all low ground. The Diolcus was in Corinthian territory, and a part, or perhaps the whole, of the profits derived from it went to the city.

(The maps are, I hope, substantially correct, but have no claim to perfect accuracy.)

PALESTINE LETTER

THE valley of the Wady Far'ah, on the eastern slopes of the highlands of Samaria, forms an area enclosed on all sides by mountain barriers except to the south east, where it gives access to the Jordan valley and Transjordan. Besides this natural independence, the valley has the additional advantage of being an important line of communication between Central Palestine and the countries to the east. The river which flows through it, is, after the Jordan and the river of Jaffa, the largest in Palestine and with efficient management could make the valley fertile enough to produce crops of all kinds. It is easy to understand therefore, in the light of these facts, why this area has been the scene of human settlement from remote antiquity. Tell Far'ah, the mound or hill containing the remains of the successive civilizations which have occupied the flat space dominating the spring, covers an area reached by few of the Palestinian Tells.

The Directors of the French Archaeological School (a section of the Biblical School) had long noted the evident importance of the site. The main object of the first campaign of excavation undertaken by the Rev. Father de Vaux, O.P., during the months, June to October 1946, was to determine the chief periods of occupation of the site. To do this it was of course necessary to cut through the hill vertically at

a selected spot on its northern side. The earliest evidences of human habitation date back to the Chalcolithic Age—that is to say, to the period during which bronze was first used side by side with dressed stone. Instruments of flint and bone, and fragments of pottery are the earliest evidences of this period. Remains too of buildings of a primitive style date back to the earlier part of this period. Underneath one of these buildings were found the remains of a very young child buried in part of a jar. The flint instruments and the decoration of the pottery are similar to the remains of the early Chalcolithic Age which have been found in the Plain of Esdraelon, Early Bronze I, the layer above the Chalcolithic, is represented by buildings of the third millennium B.C., constructed of stone or of brick and beaten earth laid on a foundation of stone. The principal rooms have floors of beaten earth with a flag-stone in the centre on which stood the post that supported the roof. Besides large numbers of flints and a few pearls there were also found in these ruins two bronze fragments and an extensive collection of pottery, among which were many large jars without handles and with wide necks. Vessels like these have been found at Beisan, Megiddo and Jericho. This flourishing period of occupation was cut short towards the end of Early Bronze I (about 2,500 B.C.) by an extensive fire which has left a layer of ashes over the whole ruin. The subsequent re-occupation of the site was poor and thinly scattered.

The buildings of the second millennium B.C. seem to have occupied a smaller area than those of the earlier period, but the chief constructions of this age are to be sought elsewhere, probably towards the north west angle of the *tell*. Discoveries in the *tell* of imported pottery are still too few to enable us to draw any conclusions about the Late Bronze Age. The whole of Iron Age I (1200—900) is represented up to the time when the site was abandoned in the ninth century B.C. Not until the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine periods are reached, do we find evidence of any re-occupation of the site and then only in certain limited areas. These later buildings were erected on the slopes of the hill or in the gardens.

Considering that this first campaign was relatively short and that work was slowed up because of a serious accident sustained by the director of excavations, the results—in the shape of work done, objects found and reports drawn up by Father de Vaux's team of collaborators—are regarded, by those best competent to judge, as very satisfactory. It is still too early to put forward any historical explanation on the basis of the results so far achieved. No doubt later excavation will supply the necessary evidence.

In a dry country like Palestine a spring beside a much travelled road and three hours journey on foot from an important town would naturally be regarded by travellers as an inviting spot for a halt. Without going as far as Cariathiarim, which enjoys these advantages, it is clear

that the streams which issue from the foot of the hill on which it stands were bound to attract the attention of anyone journeying between Jerusalem and the coastal plain. At the time of the Roman *cursus publicus* the first relay after leaving a city was located whenever possible at the ninth mile stone. West of Jerusalem, the village of Cariathiarim was situated at just such a spot. The Emperor Hadrian stationed there a detachment of the Tenth Legion, Fretensis, whose name is still to be read on the wall of a large reservoir which collected the waters of the spring for the use of the cavalry and the flocks and herds. During the Frankish occupation of the Holy Land, which was a result of the Crusades, the Roman reservoir became the crypt of a church belonging to the Knights Hospitallers—the site being probably regarded as that of Emmaus of the Gospels, at sixty stades from Jerusalem.

But both before and after the Crusades, the Moslems had put up various buildings on this spot which were closely interwoven with the constructions of the Franks. Excavation alone could disentangle so complicated a situation. Under the direction of the French Archaeological School of Jerusalem it has been possible, though not without difficulty, to distinguish the successive phases of construction and to determine the purpose of each building. It was first discovered that a caravanserai had existed here in the ninth century, with its various rooms, its little mosque, and in the centre of the courtyard, a circular basin. Important restoration work was carried out during the Mameluke period (fourteenth—fifteenth centuries, to adapt the old caravanserai to the normal plan of Syrian hostelries. This second conclusion is beyond dispute.

In the middle of all these vicissitudes, the church (served by the Benedictine Fathers of Abu Gosh since the beginning of the century) has fortunately lost none of that sober elegance which is the mark of the sanctuaries of the Middle Ages. The adjoining monastery has revived the traditions of hospitality handed down from the original knights of St. John of Jerusalem through their Arab successors.

The wall of Jerusalem, as restored during the tenth century, followed, so far as its southern sector is concerned, the line of the present wall. Since that time there exists in the south-east part of the wall a gate, called at first *Bab Silwan* because it faced the direction of the Pool of Siloe. At the time of the Frankish occupation, it was called the Tannery Postern, because of the existence of a tannery next to the Pool of Siloe, the waters of which were good for tanning leather. But in the thirteenth century the reservation of a part of the city for Arabs coming from the Moghreb (Algeria, Morocco and Spain) as soldiers, students or pilgrims, caused the name to be changed once more to *Bab el-Mogharbeh*. This name, as well as the quarter itself, exists today near the Wailing Wall to the south-west of the Haram esh Sherif.

Western topographers have tried to identify this gate with the Dung Gate of Nehemias (2 Esd.) iii, 13. This is an error—although for long

the epithet Dung Heap would have suited Bab el-Mogharbeh. The Nehemiah gate of this name belonged to an older wall further to the south which overlooked the valley of Ge-Hinnom (Gehenna). Towards the fifteenth century native Christians thought out a play on the name Mogharbeh and called this gate *khum-ibreh* (eye of a needle). In consequence, pilgrims to the Holy Land identified it with the eye of a needle referred to by our Lord (Mt. xix, 24) ! This gate, the narrowest of all the gates of Jerusalem, appeared to deserve no more dignified title than that of postern, especially with the ugly dark building with which it had been covered for many a long year.

To judge by its wretched appearance one would think that it must have been overlooked at the time of the great restoration carried out by Soliman in 1537. This is not so, however, for quite recently, the ugly vestibule has been demolished, exposing to view a finely ornamented gateway ending in a broken arch decorated with carved arch-stones. The whole is a reproduction on a smaller scale of the design of the Zion Gate (Gate of the Prophet David). Above the gateway an open flower is carved in relief. The surroundings of the gateway have been cleaned and levelled. Through the opening thus left, a loaded camel can easily pass, and the women of Siloe, balancing great baskets of vegetables on their heads, are proud to pass through this fine gateway which no longer deserves the title of Dung Gate or the undignified name of "Eye of a needle."

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

What evidence is there, apart from the Gospels, for the statement that Christ was born in Bethlehem? Nazareth was the home of Joseph and Mary. Certain modern writers maintain that the Gospel account of Christ's birth in Bethlehem is merely an attempt to show that Jesus is the Messiah foretold in Old Testament prophecy, and has no sound historical foundation.

It would be only too easy to turn the question against the questioner by the comment: If Christ was not born in Bethlehem, where was He born? As regards the traditional place of His birth we have a quantity of early testimony (Justin, Origen, Jerome, and others), and we have no testimony at all which would make Nazareth the place of the Nativity. And, as regards the earliest testimony, contemporaneous with the first Christians, we have two witnesses—the Gospels of SS. Matthew and Luke, and both of these clearly mention Bethlehem, not Nazareth,