

The "Synagogue of Abraham" at Hebron

by J. PINKERFELD

The author publishes photographs of the Synagogue of Abraham at Hebron, destroyed during the recent riots.

The Synagogue, built in the 16th cent., consisted of a central Hall with a dome on pendentives. The Thora shrine and the ancient door of sycamore wood originally belonged to a synagogue at Gaza and were brought to Hebron at the end of the 18th cent.

The Climate of the Judaeen Desert

by D. ASCHBEL

The Judaeen desert comprises the country bordered in the West by the mountain-ridges of Benyamin and Judah (along the line Ramallah—Hebron—Yaḥṭa—Es-Samu^a), and extending eastwards to the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea.

The fact that this area has become a "desert", is to be explained in the following way: The air which reaches the Jordan Valley coming from the Mountains of Judah, becomes condensated through the increase of atmospheric pressure. The condensation creates heat and therefore the temperature rises at a ratio of 1° Centigrade to every 100 m. The condensation of the air also diminishes its relative humidity and the air which is usually coming from the West and getting hot and dry on its way, converts the descending hills into a desert. Even the clouds which bear rain when floating from the coast to the hills gradually vanish, when meeting the descending air.

The distribution of rains in the Judaeen hills and in the Judaeen Desert is shown in fig. 4. We may see there that the amount of rain is gradually increasing from the coastal plain till the watershed ridge, but rapidly decreasing from the watershed ridge eastward. The formation of numerous canyons and riverbeds in the desert shows, that this region was much more abundant in rains in ancient times, especially during the last glacial period.

The desert received apparently in ancient times its larger amount of rain in spite of the physical law governing the descent of air as explained above. Partly because the difference in level between the mountain ridge and the valley, full of water, was not as large, and partly because the then prevailing conditions of humidity influenced also the slope which was rich in rains. Torrential rains are characteristic of the Desert region and occur always when cold currents of air meet with hot air-

currents. Such rains may be quite disastrous owing to their sudden appearance and vehemence.

Conclusions: the Area between the mountains and the Jordan Valley became a Desert owing to the descent of the currents of air from West to East. This is the reason for the scarcity of rain, dew and springs and for the paucity of vegetation and of cultivable fields.

The Synagogue on the Tomb of the Prophet Samuel

by I. SHOHET

According to R. Benjamin of Tudela who visited Palestine in the 12th cent., the Crusaders transferred the tomb of Samuel from Ramleh to Shiloh. "Shiloh" which is described as being two miles distant from Jerusalem, is no doubt to be identified with Nebi Samwil.

Various letters and chronicles of the 13th and 15th cent. mention a Synagogue at Nebi Samwil to which Jews used to come frequently to pray, to light candles and to bring gifts for distribution to the poor.

But already in the 15th cent. a fight started between Jews and Arabs for the possession of the Synagogue and during the last third of the 16th cent. it passed into the hand of the Moslems.

After that period the Jews could visit the place only by permission of the Qadi of Jerusalem.

The Synagogue still existed in the first half of the 18th cent. when it was converted into a Mosque.

The Pilgrimage to Palestine in 1521 C. E.

by N. SHALEM

The author gives a summary of *A Pilgrimage to Palestine in 1521 C. E.* published by I. Ben-Zevi in the series "Library of Palestinology" and points out that the Traveller intended to describe mainly the economic life of the countries he visited.

The ancient map published together with *The Pilgrimage* may not have been drawn up by the Traveller because of the following considerations:

1) the handwriting is different, 2) the places marked on the map do not correspond to those described in the text, 3) the spelling of the place names is different.

On the other hand there are reasons to believe that the text and the map belong to the same author. There remains the possibility that the Traveller drew the map some time after having written the text, and that he corrected the spelling on base of his knowledge of the Arabic pronunciation. He may also have found out, that Tripoli lies outside the limits of Palestine.

The First Mention of Jewish Antiquities at Sheikh Abreiq

by E. L. SUKENIK

A German Archaeological Expedition under Thiersch and Hölscher investigated in 1903 several ancient sites in Palestine and Syria with a view to propose a site for excavation.

With reference to Sheikh Abreiq Thiersch and Hölscher write as follows:

"We have seen near Sheikh Abreiq a number of Jewish tombs, one of which was opened recently. The coarse drawings and the script suggest the Roman Period. According to the inscription the tomb belonged to "*Benjamin Bar Isaak, Raban Torah*".

This is the first occurrence of the title "Raban" in Jewish Epigraphy.

An Ancient Name of the Syrian Desert

by H. L. GINSBERG

The "Wilderness of Kadesh" mentioned in Psalms 29, 8 and in the texts of Ras Shamra (Ugarit) has no relation to Kadesh Barnea in Edom, nor to Kadesh in Syria.

The prominent position given to the "Wilderness of Kadesh" in the psalm and its mention in the text of Ras Shamra make it clear that "Kadesh" is the ancient name of the Syrian Desert.

The above is a proof of the authors theory that Psalm 29 is an old Canaanite hymn adapted to the worship of the Lord.

The Bearded Vulture

by J. AHARONI

The bearded Vulture פֶּרֶס, mentioned several times in the Bible, is known to break (פֶּרַס) the bones of tortoises and to throw them down from great heights on rocks in order to get out the marrow. He is unique among other birds in having a beard. The name *Peres* (פֶּרַס) is translated by Onkelos with the Aramaic expression *Ar* (עַר).

The name *Ar* occurs as the designation of a region in Moab, which is the chief residence of the Bearded Vulture.

The geographical name *Ar* is in its turn translated by Aqilas as *L'hayath* (לַחַיִּית) which corresponds to the Arabic *Lihyah* (لِيَه) = beard.

All three names of the Vulture (פֶּרַס, עַר, לַחַיִּית) have thus an explanation in the characteristic features of this animal.

Brief Report on the Third Season's Work at Beth Shearim

by B. MAISLER

The most important result of the third seasons work was the discovery of a *Synagogue* on the N. E. part of the hill. The *Synagogue* is orientated towards Jerusalem and surrounded by

a thick wall of dressed stones, preserved to a height of 2-4 layers. In front of the building is a platform, from which access is gained, through three entrances, to the central court. The court originally had a mosaic pavement of which some parts remain. Within the court were two cisterns hewn in the rock.

The Synagogue proper has a basilica-plan, consisting of three naves which were divided from each other by rows of columns.

The excavation helped to solve two problems connected with the architecture of ancient synagogues in Palestine. The first problem is the place of the Torah-shrine which was found to be near the wall orientated towards Jerusalem (as at Capernaum). The second problem is offered by the Bema near the N. W. wall.

The main hall was originally paved with slabs of white marble and the walls were covered with painted plaster.

The Synagogue flourished in the third cent. C. E. and was apparently destroyed towards the middle of the fourth century.

In addition, a new *Catacomb* was discovered, the building and decoration of which are superior to those of the other catacombs. The main hall is as yet unexcavated.

On a rock-knoll outside the catacomb were the remains of a *Mausoleum*, were the remains of dressed stones and decorated on all four sides with arches and carved architectural details. The most important of these is an animal frieze.

From the debris came the fragments of a marble sarcophagus and an inscription dealt with by Dr. Schwabe.

The Greek Inscriptions discovered at Beth Shearim during the Third Season

by M. SCHWABE

The excavations of the third season at Sheikh Abreiq yielded a number of inscriptions which are important for the history of the site. In the area of the Synagogue were found one Hebrew and fourteen Greek inscriptions. Most of them are partly mutilated and appear to have been originally fixed on the walls of the Synagogue. Some of them contain merely names and probably served to indicate the owners of the seats, or else to commemorate the names of persons who donated parts of the paving.

Near the Catacomb were found fragments of a large inscription, broken up intentionally in ancient times. The inscription represents an epitaph written in greek verse, for the memory of a Jew, Justus the son of Leontius, who lived and died at Beth-Shearim. The ancient name of the site ἐν... Βεσάρρα ἢ ἐν... [B]εσάρ[οις] can be reconstructed with certainty.

The epitaph is composed in Homeric style and proves that knowledge of Greek literature was common at Beth-Shearim.