

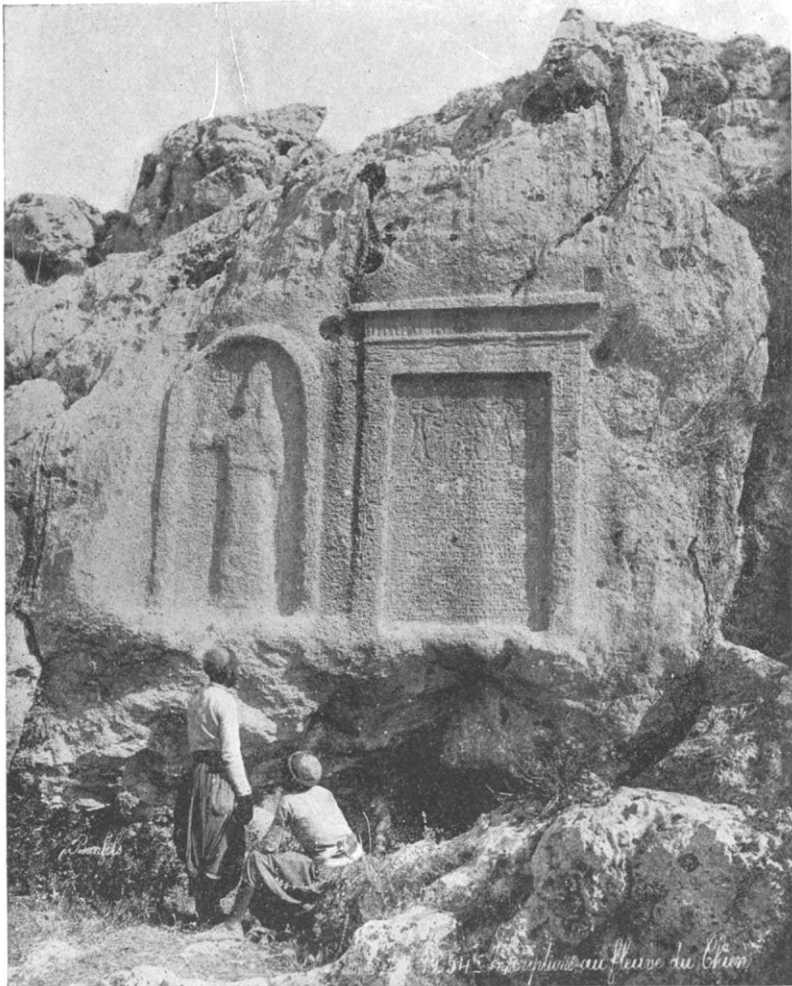
THE ANCIENT "CIRCUIT OF ARGOB."

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STARTING on May 28, 1900, from Damascus, in company with Rev. Archibald Forder, of Jerusalem, and one servant named Nussar, we struck out in the direction of the Ḥauran and Jebel ed-Druze, in order to visit the ancient "circuit of Argob," which the Scriptures inform us once belonged to Og, king of Bashan.

We had only scantily provided ourselves with the necessities of life for a trip of eight or ten days, as the case might be, for we determined that the best way in which to see these dangerous parts of the Turkish dominions was to throw ourselves upon the hospitality of the natives, display as little equipment as possible, and so avoid exciting their cupidity. Accordingly we procured a few loaves of native bread and a limited amount of tinned goods, but a full supply, on the other hand, of native costume and saddlebag trappings, to escape being detected and turned back by the Turkish soldiers who have been recently stationed at various garrisons in those parts.

Our itinerary was briefly as follows: Leaving Damascus, five and a half hours brought us to Deir 'Ali, where we put up at the house of the chief of the village, Sheikh Maḥmud. The next day took us through Braḡ, situated on the northern boundary of the lava beds of el-Lejah. We passed through this village in plain sight of the Turkish soldiers, who, however, failed to recognize us as foreigners, for we were now clad in *abba*, *kufiyeh*, and *akal*, like the Druses who inhabit those parts. We stopped in the middle of the day at a place called Suwâret el-Kebireh for refreshment and rest, inquired for the village *medâfeh*, or guest-room, and were shown to a certain house, in front of which we dismounted, and, after giving over our animals to the



STELÆ OF VICTORY ON THE ROCK WALLS OF THE DOG RIVER (NAHR EL-KELB), NEAR BEIRÛT.

The inscription on the left is that of the Assyrian conqueror Esarhaddon, 670 B. C. ; the inscription on the right is that of Rameses II., which was made about six hundred years earlier than the former.

sheikh's servants to be fed and watered, we ascended the crude stone steps to enter the court leading into the house. But here we ran into the lion's mouth. There before us, as we entered the large reception-room of the sheikh, was Judât Bey, of Damascus, the representative of the sultan, who was stationed at Ahireh, a town in the center of the lava region, and who, with



CASTLE AT SALKHAD, BUILT IN THE CRATER OF AN EXTINCT VOLCANO.

his escort of soldiers, had come over to settle some matter of dispute between certain citizens of the village. Immediately we were put through the Turkish catechism, being asked whence we came, and whither we were going; what was our purpose, and whether we were aware of the dangers before us. To all of which questions we answered with a meekness quite unlike anything to which we had before been accustomed. The result was that we were allowed to go on our way undisturbed, which was so much of a surprise to us that we hardly recovered from it during the entire trip. The second night was spent at Ummel-Haretên; the third at Marduk, having visited Shakka and

Shohba *en route*; the fourth at Salkhad, stopping on the way at Suleim and Kanawât, besides obtaining glimpses of Sueda and Hebrân. That was a very fatiguing day's ride, being over hard roads through the stony portion of Jebel Hauran. At Salkhad we put up again at the *medâfeh*, or guest-room of the village sheikh, and spent much time the next day examining the



GENERAL VIEW OF EDREI, WHERE ISRAEL AND OG FOUGHT THEIR DECISIVE BATTLE.

Roman castle, which has been built in the crater of an extinct volcano. The view from it is extensive. The Turkish representative of Salkhad, whom my companion in travel knew personally and upon whom he looked as a friend, was unfortunately away from home, so that we did not see him. We had now reached the extreme point in our itinerary, and so set our faces toward Damascus.

Leaving Salkhad, we turned westward, following the ancient stone-paved highway, and visiting Bosra, which richly abounds in Roman ruins. The first night out from Salkhad was spent at

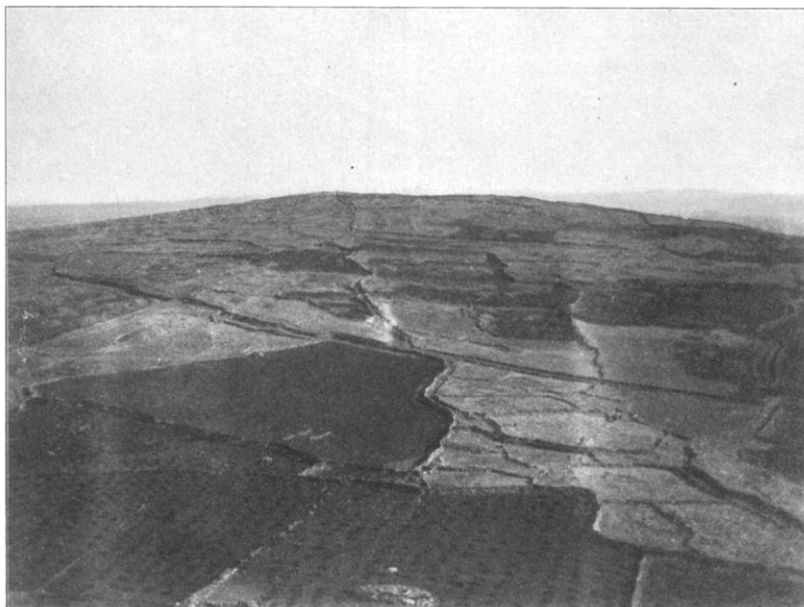
Ghasm. The second day we continued our journey, following the same old Roman road, till we came to Der'ât, or Edrei, where it is supposed the Israelites fought their decisive battle with Og, king of Bashan. We examined with enthusiasm many points of interest, and toward evening proceeded on our way through the rich harvest fields of Bashan to Muzerib, the terminus station of the Hauran railroad, which leads to Damascus. A most uncomfortable night was spent in the wretched hovel of the sheikh of that squalid little town of Muzerib. Our host seemed embarrassed by our presence, and when supper was served, which consisted merely of wheat boiled in the kernel, he apologized for having nothing else, not even bread, to set before us; and we decided that he was a very impecunious man, indeed, to be mayor of a village. The next day,



WATCHTOWER AT EDREI, CHARACTERISTIC
OF THE LAND OF BASHAN.

leaving Muzerib and turning northward, we passed on our left Tell el-'Ash'ari, an oblong hillock about sixty feet above the surrounding plain, scattered over with the ruins of different ages. The name, as is obvious, suggests Ashtaroth of the Old Testament, but we decided (and I am pleased to see that Professor George Adam Smith reaches the same conclusion; cf. the *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement*, October, 1901, p. 359) that the place can hardly be identified with the capital of Og. On the contrary, a similar hillock about eight

miles north of this, which we visited, Tell 'Ashtara, about which flow copious streams of water, is, in our opinion, more probably to be identified with Ashtaroth, the royal capital of Deut. 1:4. Going on a half-hour farther, we came to Sheikh S'ad, where again we ran into Turkish soldiers, and this time failed to escape, being compelled to accept of an escort to



A VIEW FROM SALKHAD CASTLE, LOOKING EAST TOWARD BAGHDAD.

conduct us back to Damascus. Inasmuch as we were already faced in that direction, the soldier whom the pasha sent with us in no way changed our plans or restricted our liberties. Nawa was visited *en route*, and also Zora', the latter being situated on the extreme southwest corner of the lava region of el-Lejah. Here we spent a night, and were graciously feasted by the Turkish officers, whose hospitality we quite thoroughly enjoyed; for here we found still another Turkish garrison.

The route chosen the next day was along the edge of the basaltic table-land of el-Lejah; sometimes we crossed broad promontories of basaltic black rock, while at others we followed

the seldom traveled path along the edge of the adjacent fertile plain. On the way we paused at Kirâta and Khabeḇ, the latter being an industrious Christian village, whose inhabitants are engaged in the important industry of cutting out large mill-stones from the lava which everywhere surrounds the town. Our last night out was spent in a private house at el-Mismiyeḥ, not far from Braḵ, at which there is stationed another very strong garrison of Turkish soldiers. From here we journeyed directly north one day and arrived safely at Da-



A SARCOPHAGUS AT EDREI, NOW USED AS A WATER-
ING TROUGH.

maſcus. We were gone something over nine days, during which time we practically encompassed the whole "circuit of Argob," the region of Og, king of Baſhan. In what follows we ſhall attempt to identify the "circuit of Argob" and deſcribe its features of ſpecial intereſt.

The phrase "the circuit of Argob" is mentioned in but two contexts of the Old Teſtament. In Deut., chap. 3, we read: "And we took all his cities at that time; there was not a city which we took not from them; threſcore cities, *all the region of Argob*, the kingdom of Og in Baſhan. All theſe were cities fenced with high walls, gates, and bars; beſide the unwalled towns a great many" (vss. 4, 5). "And the reſt of Gilead, and all Baſhan, the kingdom of Og, gave I unto the half tribe of Manasseh; *all the region of Argob*, even all Baſhan. (The ſame is called the land of Rephaim. Jair the ſon of Manasseh took *all the region of Argob*, unto the border of the Geſhurites and the Maacathites;

and called them, even Bashan, after his own name, Havvoth-jair, unto this day)" (vss. 13, 14.) On the other hand, in 1 Kings, chap. 4, we read: "Ben-geber, in Ramoth-gilead; to him pertained the towns of Jair, the son of Manasseh, which are in Gilead: even to him pertained the *region of Argob*, which is in Bashan, threescore great cities with walls and brazen bars" (vs. 13).

The name Argob seems to spring from a root רָגַב, *ragab*, which signifies "clods of earth" (cf. Job 21: 33; 38: 38); hence Argob would denote a rich and fertile tract or "glebe" like that of Bashan. Only on the hypothesis that the root is cognate with רָגַם, *ragam*, can it be made to signify "stony." The name is invariably used in connection with חֶבֶל, *hebel*, which signifies "cord" (Josh. 2: 15) or "measuring line" (Mic. 2: 5), and figuratively "a measured portion, or allotment" (Josh. 17: 7; 19: 9), being applied to a particular district or region (Zeph. 2: 5, 7). The common usage of this word suggests, therefore, that the expression implies a *circuit* with definite boundaries.

The identification of Argob with el-Lejah (*i. e.*, "refuge, retreat") is uncertain; its precise situation, accordingly, remains undetermined; all that can be positively affirmed is that it was located somewhere in Bashan (Deut. 3: 4). It may have included the western portion lying between Edrei, Ashtaroth, and Jebel ed-Druze (so Dillmann in his *Commentary*, and Guthe in the *Z. D. P. V.*, 1890, p. 237); or it may have designated more especially the western declivities of Jebel Ḥauran, north of Salkhad (so Driver, art. "Argob" in Hastings's *Dictionary of the Bible*). The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan restrict it to the Trachonitis of the Greeks, that is, the region known to the Arabs of today as el-Lejah, a rocky region and easily defensible. In 1838 it is said that 6,000 Druses defended it successfully against Ibrahim Pasha, of Egypt, who lost 20,000 men in attempting to force it. Argob certainly *included* this rocky portion of the land of Bashan.

El-Lejah is geologically one of the most interesting portions of all Palestine. It is an immense bed of congealed lava, which seems to have issued forth from the many now extinct cones of the Ḥauran mountains, situated a few miles to the southeast,

especially from the Ghararat el-Kibliyeh, a now extinct volcano in the northwestern portion of the mountainous district. The lava issuing from the craters of these volcanoes seems to have flowed out on every side, but especially toward the northwest, covering a territory oval in shape, about twenty-two miles long from north to south, and fifteen from east to west. Before cooling,



ANCIENT BRIDGE AT EL-KANAWÂT.

its surface was apparently violently agitated by internal convulsions of nature. The wavy surface shows in which direction the current of the thick liquid was flowing while in the process of cooling. It is frequently filled with air-bubbles; the whole mass is almost as hard as flint and emits a sharp, metallic sound when struck. Out of it, notwithstanding, many of the millstones of Syria and Palestine have been chiseled, some having been transported even as far as to Egypt.

This pear-shaped district is located about thirty miles south of Damascus and forty east of the Sea of Galilee. It rises abruptly some twenty to thirty feet above the level of the surrounding

plain; its surface is generally of the same altitude, but at the same time rough and rugged and very fatiguing to traverse. It consists largely of a solid mass of congealed basalt, appropriately called "a strange petrified ocean," with numerous detached boulders of the same black material; the surface is divided in every



STONE DOORS IN THE REGION OF ARGOB.

direction by crevices and fissures, with here and there small fertile and cultivated depressions. Through many of its labyrinthine gullies the iron-shod hoofs of horses and other beasts of burden have in course of time succeeded in wearing tracks or roads leading into the interior of the region. The Romans in their day, indeed, cut a highway through its entire length from north to south, connecting Damascus and Bosra.

Near the borders especially, but also scattered throughout this entire

region, are still to be seen the standing remains of many strongly built cities, each with its watchtower of black basalt. Over fifty have been counted. At one sweep of the eye I remember of having called my companion's attention to seven watchtowers, belonging to as many different cities close about us. Baedeker's *Handbook for Palestine and Syria* gives the names, and locates on its map of el-Lejah the situation, of nearly threescore cities and towns. Several of these today are without inhabitants, just as the sides of Jebel ed-Druze are studded with deserted villages. Wetzstein reports, in his *Reisebericht über Hauran und die Trachonen* (1860), having seen in the Druze mountains hundreds of stone-built villages with

their gates and bars. Porter also, in his *Giant Cities of Bashan*, describes the almost numberless ruins of towns and cities in this same volcanic region.

The dwellings in all these parts are ordinarily built of massive blocks of basalt stone, with stone stairways on the outside leading to the roof, and with heavy double folding doors moving in great sockets cut in door-sills and requiring all one's strength, as the writer can testify, to open and close. Many of these dwellings are still in a good state of preservation—indeed so well preserved that the traveler, in approaching one of these towns, expects to find its citizens thronging the streets; but, alas! instead he finds a deserted village. At least a score in el-Lejah alone are in this extinct condition, being absolutely without an inhabitant. The effect produced upon the traveler is weird. How long they may have been depopulated it is difficult to say. While the architecture of the superstructures seems to point in most cases to the Græco-Roman style of the early Christian centuries, one can hardly doubt but that the actual foundations of these massive structures may date from a much earlier period. Who would dare affirm that these now extinct cities do not represent in some way, if not by their superstructures, at least by their foundations, the "threescore cities" of the ancient kingdom of Og, which are described in Deuteronomy as having had high walls, double gates, and bars? For the account in Deuteronomy describes in a marvelous manner the actual conditions which exist today.

But besides these habitations of stone, which we have attempted to describe, there exist also on the west of the Zumleh range and at Edrei subterranean chambers, entered by shafts invisible from above, and intended as retreats in time of war. At Edrei there is an extensive underground city, first discovered by Wetzstein in 1860, but more fully described by Schumacher in his work *Across the Jordan*, 1882 (pp. 135 ff.), consisting of a succession of chambers with "mangers" for grain and cisterns for water, and obviously intended as a place of retreat in time of siege. According to Schumacher, "it seems probable that these underground cities are the work of the

earliest inhabitants of the Hauran, the so-called 'giants' of Scripture" (p. 139).

Perhaps it is to these subterranean resorts that reference is made in the Law when the promise is given to the children of Israel that the Lord will send the "hornet" among them, until

they that are left and hide themselves perish from before them (Deut. 7 : 20; Exod. 23 : 28). The hornets are said habitually to infest these underground places of refuge.

Troglodyte habitations also are frequently seen in the Druse mountains. Caverns have been found at Umm Dubeb, 'Ajelâ, and Shibikka on the eastern slopes of Jebel ed-Druze, along valleys cut in the soft rock, and so arranged as to



TEMPLE AT SULEIM, IN THE SOUTHEASTERN PORTION OF ARGOB.

form separate chambers. In one case, described by Wetzstein, at Hibbikke, about eight miles northeast of Salkhad, a chamber was found cut out of the rock and covered with a solid stone vault, like a tunnel or cellar. These habitations would also naturally belong to the earliest inhabitants of the region.

In view, therefore, of the character of el-Lejah and the mountainous district lying adjacent to it on the southeast, it is impossible to conclude that a rocky, unproductive region such as el-Lejah, with its sixty cities more or less, could ever have been a separate independent division of Og's territory. It is

rather more likely to suppose that in that remote age el-Lejah was the natural fortress, so to speak, within which the inhabitants of the land of Bashan, or at least all those in the adjacent parts, built their houses for self-protection. So that, when it is stated in the book of Deuteronomy that the Israelites took "all the circuit of Argob," even the threescore cities of Og, king of Bashan, the author intends to convey the thought that not only did the Israelites conquer the open country of the plain and seize the cities thereof, but also the fortified and inaccessible cities of el-Lejah and of the volcanic mountains to the southeast, driving out all the inhabitants of these regions, notwithstanding that they were able to, and probably did, betake themselves to their underground fortresses for refuge. In other words, "the circuit of Argob" is commensurate with the entire region of el-Lejah and Jebel ed-Druze—the most secure and best-defended portions of the land of Bashan, the kingdom of Og.