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Architectura Numismatica:
or, Architectural Medals of Classic Antiquity:
Illustrated and Explained by Comparison with the Monuments
And the Descriptions of Ancient Authors
And Copious Text.
One Hundred Lithographs and woodcuts.
By **T. L. Donaldson**, PHD Architect
London:
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Gate Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields
1859
London: Printed by Cox and Wyman, Great Queen Street.
Lincoln's Inn Field

(p. 116)

No. XXXIII.

TEMPLE OF FLAVIA NEAPOLIS SYRIAE
(MOUNT GERIZIM).

THIS large-sized bronze, 1 3/8 inch in diameter (M. 10), is in the French Cabinet. It is given by Mionnet (t. v. 499), and an inaccurate engraving of it appears in the supplement (t. viii. PL. XVIII. p. 346). On the obverse is the head of the emperor with the legend—
ANTΩNINOC • CEB EΨCE • AΨΨOK • KAICAP

ANTONINVS • AVGustus • Plus • IMPerator ■ CAESAR.

The date would consequently be 138—161. On the reverse is a magnificent and full representation of Mount Gerizim, with the temple and other features of the Hieron, surrounded by the words—

ΦA • NEACΠIOAEΩC • CΨPIAC ■ ΠAAAICTINH C FLaviae NEAPOLIS STRIAE
PALAESTINAE.

At the base of the mountain is a colonnade of eight intercolumniations, with a lofty arch at one end and another intercolumniation. At the further end of the colonnade an open space appears, and then there is another short colonnade with an arched opening. A carriage-road seems to run along the base of the mountain behind the long colonnade, and then to wind up the slope of the hill on the left side of the medal, and turning round a projecting mass of rock near the (p. 117) summit, loses itself (as it were) on the other side. Rough rocks appear next the margin on this side, surmounted at their top by a building, apparently meant to represent the arx or citadel, which is approached by a winding path from the carriage-road, and immediately under the arx is a cavern cut in the rock.

From the end of the arched colonnade previously mentioned there mounts a rapidly steep ascent of steps in an almost straight direction. (Eckhel, vol. iii. p. 434: *Observanti Norisio ex vetere hodoeporico anonymi, "ascenduntur usque ad summum montem gradiis numero CCC"*) At the summit is a peripteral temple with four columns on the flank and two in front, between which stands the statue of the god. The pediment and roof of the temple are quite distinct, and behind the temple is a large square tomb, or edicule or altar, on the same level as the platform of the temple. The rocks are rudely carved into masses, and various chapels or caverns are cut on the face of the rocks at different heights or levels.

There is a striking identity between the situation of the Samaritan temple of Mount Gerizim, as shown on this coin, and that of the Parthenon at Athens; and the features on this medal suggest many topics for consideration in relation to the Athenian Acropolis. In spite of the excavations of late years by the Germans, and the recent researches of Monsieur Beule ("L'Acropole d'Athenes"), which have brought to light the appearance of a peculiar inclined plane in the centre of steps leading up to the propyleum, as though for the ascent of chariots to the Acropolis of Athens, yet the fall is too rapid to render such a solution (p. 118) completely satisfactory. Is it impossible, in spite of no traces of such an arrangement being now perceptible, that the Athenian Citadel may have had a winding road, by which the chariots and animals of the procession of the Panathenaic festival may have reached the propyleum by a gentler ascent, instead of the break-neck and steep direct line by which they are now supposed to have climbed up to the fane of the goddess Minerva?

Neapolis Syriae, or Gerizim, was a mountain of Palestine, always associated in the sacred narrative with Mount Ebal; from which it is separated by a narrow valley, in which is situated the town of Nablous (Neapolis), the ancient Shechem. Josephus calls it the highest of the mountains of Samaria.

That Gerizim was regarded with special veneration by the Samaritans, prior to the erection of the temple, by which the schism was perpetuated, cannot be doubted. The circumstances that led to the erection of the temple are mentioned by Josephus. Manasseh, the brother of Jaddua the high priest, having married Nicaso, the daughter of Sanballat, was required by the Jews either to divorce his wife, or to withdraw from the priestly office. His father-in-law persuaded him to retain his wife, on the promise that he would procure permission to erect on Mount Gerizim a temple similar to that at Jerusalem. This permission he obtained from Alexander the Great, while engaged in the siege of Tyre, and its erection could scarcely have been completed, when Sanballat died. From this time forward sacrifices were offered at this temple to the Most High God, until the Samaritans, in order to escape a participation in the persecutions of the (p. 119) Jews under Antiochus Epiphanes, requested of him that their temple might be dedicated to Jupiter Hellenius, according to Josephus (*Ant. xii. 5, § 5*), but according to the author of the Second Book of Maccabees (vi. 2), followed by Eusebius (*Chron.*), to Jupiter Xenius. Shortly after, in the debate before Ptolemy Philometor (*Ant. xiii. 3, § 4*), the Samaritan advocates ignore its pagan dedication, and claim Mosaic authority for its erection; failing to establish which, they were put to death. The temple of Sanballat was destroyed by Hyrcanus, the Jewish high priest, after it had stood two hundred years (*Ant. xiii. 9, § 1*); and we have no notice of its restoration. Indeed, the allusion of the Samaritan woman (*John iv. 20*) would seem to intimate, that "this mountain" was no longer the seat of their

worship; but a temple was afterwards erected, probably over the ruins of the former, to Jupiter, according to Damascius (ap. Phot. Bibl. Cod. 242, p. 1055).

There can be no doubt that this is the temple represented on the reverse of the coins of Flavia Neapolis from the time of Titus Volusianus. (Eckhel, vol. iii. pp. 433, 434; Williams, "Holy City," p. 241, n. 4.)

It was in the possession of the Samaritans in the fifth century, when, in A.D. 474, it was transferred to the Christians by the Emperor Zeno, in reprisal for the ruin and desecration of five churches by the Samaritans in the city of Neapolis. The church, dedicated to the Virgin, was slightly fortified, and guarded by a small detachment of the large garrison of the city.

In the reign of Anastasius it was recovered for a (p. 120) short time by the Samaritans, who were finally ejected by the Emperor Justinian, when the mountain was more strongly fortified. (Procopius, "De -AEdil." v. 7; Robinson, " Bib. Res." vol. iii. pp. 123-5.)

From that time to the present the Samaritans have had no edifice on the site, but for a very long period have been in the habit of sacrificing on the mountain at their three great festivals; a practice which is continued to the present day. "The spot where they sacrifice the passover, seven lambs among them all, is pointed out just below the highest point, and before coming to the last slight acclivity. It is marked by two parallel rows of rough stone laid upon the ground, and a small round pit, roughly stoned up, in which the flesh is roasted."

A little beyond this, and higher up the mountain, "are the ruins of an immense structure, bearing every appearance of having once been a large and strong fortress." They are called El Kulah (the castle) by the Samaritans, and are probably the remains of the fortress erected by Justinian. (Robinson, vol. iii. p. 99.)

Round a large naked rock, a little to the south of the castle, which is reputed the most sacred place of all, are traces of walls, which may possibly indicate the position of the temple, particularly as the Samaritans profess that this is the place where the ark formerly rested in the tabernacle. Further south, and indeed all around upon this eminence, are extensive foundations, apparently of dwellings, as if ruins of a former city. There are also many cisterns, but they are now all dry.

The Rev. Mr. Stanley, in his interesting volume (p. 121) on Sinai and Palestine, alludes to the sacred spot illustrated by our medal.

Other medals of different sizes are in the British Museum of the same type, but varied in the inscriptions: some with an eagle with outstretched wings on the exergue.

Comments on this section from the Editor of theSamaritanUpdate.com

This reference is not located in *A Bibliography of the Samaritans, Third Edition, Revised, Expanded, and Annotated*, by Alan David Crown and Reinhard Pummer, ATLA Bibliography, No. 51, **The Scarecrow Press, Inc.** Lanham, Maryland, Toronto, Oxford. 2005