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Mr. Tyrwhitt Drake's Reports

August 22, 1872

(p. 191)

Before leaving Nablus we paid a visit to the Samaritan synagogue, to inspect the famous MSS. Taking off our boots, we entered the synagogue with the old priest Amran, who, without any difficulty, showed us the first MS. This is contained in a brass scroll-case ornamented with a florid arabesque of silver, fastened on in very thin narrow plates. I then asked him to show us the other two rolls—viz., the one said to be written by Abishuah and the next oldest. At this request the old man expressed the utmost surprise, and wished me to believe that this was the real Simon Pure. As, however, on my first visit with Mr. Palmer I had seen two, and on a subsequent visit with Captain Burton three, I was able to assure him that I knew all about them. He then said the key was with his nephew Takub, who soon appeared, and after a little persuasion showed No. 2, enclosed in a case of workmanship similar to but better than No. 1. On one side of this are depicted the cherubim and altar, the branched candlestick, the pot, of manna, Aaron's rod, the flesh-hook, and other sacred utensils.¹ A legend round the edge gives the date A.H. 860—or A.D. 1456—(the Samaritans have since, soon after the Mohammedan conquest, dated by the year of the Flight)—and the name of the workman, Yakub ben Fawki, of the town of Damascus. Amran told me that an old tradition states it to be the work of a Damascene Jew. The style of work is distinctly Perso-Damascene, and is still employed in the ornamentation of narghiles, trays, dishes, and other brass ware, by a Persian Jew now living at Damascus. These things are often sold to travellers by the *bric-d-brac* dealers as genuine antiques. Having inspected No. 2, I asked to be shown the real MS. Both the priests immediately exclaimed that there were no more, but I again assured them that I had seen it. Takub looked nervously at his uncle, and asked what was to be done. Amran shrugged his shoulders and said he did not care. Takub then asked me why, having seen it once, I wanted to see it again. I replied that Lieutenant Conder had never seen it. He then said that he could not bring it out of its chest.² This was just what suited us, as we were

¹ For photographs of this see the P. E. F. series, Nos. 225—228.

² This can only be done when the high priest is ceremonially clean, and has been that day to the bath.

able to see the rolls in their places behind the veil (a white quilted counterpane) and assure ourselves that there were no others. *The* roll (No. 3) is kept in a case of solid silver of modern workmanship, and has all the appearance of much greater antiquity than either of the other two. It is treated, too, with the greatest respect. On opening it Takub kept repeating *Destur* (permission) and *Bismillah* (in the name of God). The evidently real hesitation about showing this roll at once proclaims it to be the one venerated by these Cuthim. It is kept in a cupboard or upright chest with No. 2, No. 1 being in a separate box outside.

(p.192) The roll No. 3 is seldom shown to travellers; in fact, I believe that very few indeed have seen it. But as it is now getting generally known that there are three rolls, I hear that the Samaritans intend getting up a fourth to show instead of No. 3. In course of time they have grown to regard this roll as a fetish, and though they will forswear themselves by the name of God as easily as other orientals, an oath on this is sacred. An anecdote showing the value at which it is held by an intelligent British tourist, was told me on the best authority. A certain Englishwoman, travelling with a firman from the Sultan and at government expense, came to Nablus, and made arrangements to see the rolls by night, as it was the time of the Passover, and the High Priest was engaged on Gerizim during the day. Having seen it, she presented a backshish of one shilling. Such munificence ought to make us proud of our countrywoman.

There is a curious fact connected with the Samaritans. The whole number of the community is 135 or 136, and of these eighty are males and fifty-five females. Considering the long course of intermarriage practised by these people it is very remarkable, and is tending rapidly to destroy the race, as marriage, either for men or women, with other than their own sect, is strictly forbidden.

There is at Jerusalem, in the possession of Mrs. Ducat, a poor German Jewess, a Samaritan MS. called the "Fire-ried," about which a few notes taken from an account written by Dr. Jacob Frederick Kraus may prove interesting.³

It is called the "Fire-ried" by the Samaritans from a note at the end of the Book of Numbers to this effect—"It came out from the fire by the power of the Lord to the hand of the king of Babel, in presence of Zerubbabel the Jew, and was not at all burnt. Thanks be to the Lord for the Law of Moses."

It is in the form of a book—not a roll—written on parchment, and contains 217 leaves. It is incomplete at beginning and end, as it commences at Genesis xi. 11, and ends at the beginning of Moses' blessing in Deuteronomy. The pages are 11 by 9 inches. The text is divided into verses and sentences; words at the end of a line are not broken, but—except in the case of the name of the Lord—the letters are spread out to fill up the required space. The letters are rather larger than those in Abishuah's roll (Samaritan No. 3), and some appear to have been gilt. The decalogue is not, as in later MSS-, numbered at margin. The paragraphs are not numbered or described as in more modern ones, which, for instance, say, "This is the first book of Moses, containing 260 paragraphs," &c. Dr. Kraus considers these to be two proofs of great antiquity. He goes on to say that Abishuah's roll has a kind of acrostic in the middle of the lines, made by darkening one or more letters. Bead down the roll this makes, "I, Abishuah, son of Phineas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest—the goodwill of the Lord and his glory be on them—

³ See photographs Nos. 171—174.

have written this holy book in the door of the (p. 193) tent of the congregation on Mouut Gerizim, in the thirteenth year of the government of the children of Israel in the land of Canaan, with its boundaries round about. I thank the Lord."

The "fire-tried" MS. has no acrostic, but a note at the end of Genesis: "This holy Torah has been established by a wise, valiant, and great daughter" (?) " a good, precious, and intelligent leader, and by a master of all knowledge, from Shelomo son of Saba, a valiant man, a leader of the congregation, and an instructor of his generation, as well by his knowledge as by his intelligence; he was a benefactor and an interpreter of the Torah and a father of blessings; he was of the sons of Nun—may the Lord be gracious to them—and it was appointed to be a thing dedicated to the Lord, that men should read therein with fear and prayer in the house of the High Priest on the tenth day of the seventh month, and this was performed in my presence, and I am Ithamar, son of Aaron, son of Ithamar, the High Priest. May the Lord renew his strength. Amen." Thus far Dr. Kraus.

The MS. was obtained by Mrs. Ducat's late husband in the payment of a bad debt. Owing to the exaggerated price (£1,000) asked for it when brought to England a few years ago it has never been sold. It could now be purchased probably for about £200.

The survey is proceeding most satisfactorily, and in about another month we hope to begin measuring the second base-line on the plain of Esdraelon.

Comments on this section from the Editor of theSamaritanUpdate.com

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