

Reproduced from the Library of the Editor of
www.theSamaritanUpdate.com
Copyright 2011

Mediterranean Sketches
By **Lord Francis Egerton**

London: Murray, Albemarle Street.
MDCCCXLIII (1843)
London: Printed by A. Spottiswoode,
New-Street Square.

(p. 87)....Our visit detained us till dusk, and we were anxious to visit the heads of the remnant of Samaritan sectarians now existing in Nablous alone, and to see their famous copy of the Pentateuch.

THE PATRIARCH. THE SYNAGOGUE.

One of the heads of this small body, consisting of about sixty families, was in the employ of the governor as a clerk or secretary. By this individual we were conducted to the house of their patriarch, where we were kindly, and with great tokens of respect, received by him and a numerous family. These poor people were, I apprehend, much impressed with the notion of our influence; and a hint was given that it would be greatly to the advantage of our respective countries if a consul were established at Nablous in the person of our conductor, the governor's clerk. These situations are of little or no emolument; but they are universally courted in Syria, as they are considered to afford protection to the holder, who is, however, invariably the object of intrigues and calumnies, which probably counterbalance the advantages of his dignity. We were next conducted to the synagogue, where the famous MS. was unrolled to us by the chief rabbi. I mention our having seen it more to acquaint others, who might be better qualified to turn the inspection to account, of (p. 88) the fact that there is no difficulty in obtaining permission to do so, than for any other reason. I apprehend that few but the Samaritans themselves put faith in the extreme antiquity ascribed to it. I could wish, however, that some worthy successor of Dr. Kennicot could be found to collate and report upon it. The Samaritans, as sectarians, are perhaps hardly entitled to much sympathy: their schism was a wanton one; but the discrepancies between their version of the Pentateuch and others have an interest for Christians, inasmuch as some of the best commentators, and among them Kennicot, have leant to the Samaritan. A more interesting document to us was a letter received by the Samaritan community from a body of their brethren in India.¹

¹ Since writing the above, I have fallen upon some passages in Klaproth's "Asia Polyglotta," which bear upon the question of the Samaritan version. He quotes a passage from Kennicot, in which that great Hebraist avows a reluctant conviction, that of the three oldest versions of the Old Testament, — the Jewish, the Septuagint, and the Samaritan, — the former has been designedly falsified. It appears that there was a tradition among the Jews, that the advent of the Messiah was to take place in the six thousandth of the years of the world. It became, therefore, an object of the Jews to show that the date of our Saviour's ministry was too early for this period, and of the Christians to prove the contrary. For this purpose, the former counted genealogies in such a manner as to place the flood 2348 before Christ; the Septuagint, 3716, was adopted by the early Christians. The Samaritans, having no special object, retained the true number, 3044. So much for the conclusions of Kennicot, reluctantly derived from thirty years' investigation. Klaproth, adopting them, brings to his aid the lore of Eastern Asia, and shows that India and (Cont'd on page 89) China bring the flood to within half a century of the Samaritan chronology. The general result is: — Samaritan, 3044

(p. 89) ASCENT OF MOUNT GERIZIM.

It had been our intention to continue our journey towards Carmel the following day, but an offer of our Samaritan friends to accompany us to the summit of Mount Gerizim, coupled with the attractions of our camp, induced us to devote another day to Nablous and its environs.

We left our tents early, and in a few minutes were engaged in a very steep ascent, which, in less than an hour, placed us on a ridge nearly level with the peak of Mount Gerizim, on which the Samaritans perform still their annual sacrifice, and where they profess to show the altar erected by Joshua in commemoration of his conquest of the promised land. It is well known that one of the main discrepancies between the Samaritan version and the others which have been adopted by the translators of the Christian churches of Europe, affects the locality of this altar. According to the latter, Mount Ebal, and not Mount Gerizim, was the eminence appointed by divine command for the erection of this monument. Correct the text as we will, there is undoubtedly nothing in it to justify the sect in worshipping on this mountain to the exclusion of Jerusalem and all others, or to warrant the offence of that schism (p. 90) which has met its earthly requital in dispersion and all but extermination. Joshua is commanded to erect an altar, but not to ordain it as the perpetual place of gathering and worship for the tribes. Doubt, however, existing as to the mere question between Gerizim and Ebal, I was curious to ascertain whether any remains exist on the former which might tend to throw light on the subject; for though many travellers before me had performed the ascent, a matter of no difficulty or labour, I was not aware that they had directed any particular attention to this point. We rode along the mountain ridge, covered with rich herbage and wild flowers, till we reached the spot of the annual sacrifice, which is at some distance from that shown as Joshua's altar. The ground here is rather depressed to a centre, so that a larger multitude than the Samaritans can now muster might conveniently witness the proceeding, as from a theatre. A few stones formed into an altar, and a paved trench to carry off the victim's blood, are all the tokens of the place and its purposes. A little further, on the extreme and most elevated summit which overlooks the valley, are some very extensive remains of a Roman fortress, with large tanks and much masonry of massy and regular construction. Beyond this is the alleged altar, a sort of table, level with the surrounding ground, and at first sight appearing to be nothing more than the natural face of the rock from which the surface soil has been removed, and divided into compartments by natural accidents of fracture and fissure. Such I at first considered it, and such perhaps it may be. On (p. 91) closer inspection, however, I was induced to adopt the opinion that it was artificial. It slopes at an angle fully sufficient for the sacrificial purpose of allowing blood to drain off towards the cavernous mouth of a deep well. Of these wells there are several near, and in two at least of them I thought I perceived that the stones of the orifice had been arranged artificially, and if so with consummate skill, and to be in fact specimens of that kind of architecture best known by the term cyclopean, — stones, namely, unhewn, but fitted to one another with a felicity which, on a small scale, is often exhibited by the dyke-builders of Scotland. Now Joshua was directed to build his altar of whole stones untouched by iron tool; and on looking at the altar itself, and comparing it with the wells in the neighbourhood, I was much inclined to the opinion that all were of the same construction,

before Christ; Indian chronology, 3101; Chinese, 3082. An average of the three would place it at 3076, or 728 years before the Jewish, 640 after the Septuagint.

and of one which would answer this description. I have said perhaps enough to direct the attention of some more competent enquirer to the point, and by such I should wish it to be decided, rather than by the results of my own cursory and inadequate inspection. Another scriptural association belongs to this summit, in its being the spot from which the first apologue on record was addressed by Jotham to his countrymen. Altogether it is well worth a visit. The Samaritans also claim for it the honour of being the scene of Abraham's sacrifice of his son, and show the altar, — a claim which neither Christian nor Jew will for a moment entertain. It is easily accessible for horses; and one of the views of the town, (p. 92) at the beginning of the ascent, forms one of the finest landscapes I have seen in Syria. A ruined tower of the middle ages is on the left of the foreground, which is otherwise made up of a mass of foliage, in which the deep green of the apricot and fig predominates. A single palm tree breaks this mass in the front, and others are seen in the distance, adding to the oriental effect of the picture of the city itself, with its terraced roofs, mosques, and cupolas. Mount Gerizim on the one side and Ebal on the other, feathered with olive groves, complete the scene. In some of its features, Nablous struck me as not unlike Bagneres de Bigorre in the Pyrenees.

ILLUSTRATION OF A PASSAGE IN ST. JOHN.

While reposing under the olive trees of our camp, I watched the flocks of the neighbourhood on their way to the water below. The custom, universal in Syria, and I believe not uncommon elsewhere, of the shepherd going before the sheep, reminded me of St. John's Gospel, x. 4.

MOUNT EBAL.

Lady F. and myself, after the heat of midday was over, resolved to ascend the opposite elevation of Mount Ebal, and to endeavour to ascertain whether any remains could be found there. Our attempt was unproductive and indecisive. We soon found the ascent impracticable for horses; and, I believe, our faithful janissary, Hassan, who insisted on accompa- (p. 93) nying us, seldom has had such a breathing on foot as we gave him. He toiled on before us with his sabre and loose trowsers, till we reached what had appeared to us the summit, but which proved to be only an inferior part of the long ridge which runs parallel with Gerizim. Should any remains, therefore, exist (a fact of which I could collect no indication, but which my Samaritan friends might perhaps designedly suppress), they should be looked for further to the northward.

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

The visit was in 1840.

Francis Egerton, 1st Earl of Ellesmere KG, PC (1 January 1800 – 18 February 1857), known as **Lord Francis Leveson-Gower** until 1833, was a British politician, writer, traveller and patron of the arts. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Egerton,_1st_Earl_of_Ellesmere

Lady Egerton wrote Journal of a Tour in the Holy Land
<http://shomron0.tripod.com/journalholyland1840egerton.pdf>