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SCRIPTURAL TOPOGRAPHY, OR MODERN DESCRIPTIONS OF ANCIENT
LOCALITIES IN THE HOLY LAND.

THE REMNANT OF THE SAMARITANS AT NAPLOUS.

(p. 60)

IF it be a mournful spectacle to behold on Mount Lebanon the few decaying cedars that survive its far-famed forest", it must be still more melancholy to contemplate that handful of people who still linger upon the mountains of Samaria, as the last remains of the Samaritan people!

Besides the sympathy that must be felt for the wasted and impoverished descendants of a once formidable nation, a great interest attaches to them as the depositaries of the five books of Moses, written in the peculiar alphabetic character which they employed, and which differed much from the square letters in use amongst the Jews.

The existence of the Samaritan Pentateuch was known to Jerome and other Hebrew scholars in the fourth century; but the fact seems to have been lost sight of for more than twelve hundred years, as we believe there are no traces in the history of criticism and sacred literature, that Christian scholars were aware of its preservation until the first quarter of the seventeenth century.

The solicitude which was naturally felt by the learned to possess themselves of copies of the Samaritan Pentateuch, led to inquiries and correspondence respecting the people who had it in their keeping, and who had been preserved as a distinct community to give their independent testimony to its genuineness and authenticity.

The learned Dr. Robinson has supplied the following interesting particulars of their literature and correspondences, which have been collected in consequence of these inquiries.

"A greater interest, however, has been excited on behalf of the Samaritans, and more information acquired respecting them, in consequence of their correspondence with several learned Europeans, and the publication of their copies of the Pentateuch. The existence of the Pentateuch among them seems to have been early known to scholars; and Julius Scaliger, in the sixteenth century, was the first, according to De Sacy, to point out

the importance of obtaining copies of it in Europe. This wish was first fulfilled by the traveller Delia Valle in A. D. 1616. When at Constantinople, on his way to the East, he was commissioned by De Sancy, then French ambassador in that city, to purchase Samaritan manuscripts, and, after attempting it in vain at Cairo, Gaza, and Nabulus, he was able to procure at Damascus two copies of the Pentateuch: one on parchment, exhibiting the Hebrew text in Samaritan characters, he transmitted to the ambassador; the other, on paper, containing the Samaritan version, he retained (p. 61) for himself. The former was sent by De Sancy to the library of the Oratoire in Paris, and was published by J. Morin in the Paris Polyglott; the latter was loaned by Delia Valle to the same editor, and appeared also in the same work. Both were afterwards reprinted, with slight corrections, in the London Polyglott. The munificence of Archbishop Usher was able to procure, not long after, no fewer than six additional manuscripts of the Hebrew-Samaritan Pentateuch; another was sent to England by Robert Huntington, about A. D. 1672; and the number continued to increase, so that Kennicott was able to collate, for his great work, not less than sixteen manuscripts more or less complete. Of these, six are in the Bodleian Library, and one in the British Museum. The Samaritan-Arabic version of Abu Sa'id has never yet been fully printed, but lies in seven manuscripts in the libraries of Home, Oxford, Paris, and Leyden. The general merits of all these copies of the Pentateuch have been investigated by able scholars.

"Long before the wish of the elder Scaliger had thus been fulfilled, in the acquisition and publication of the Samaritan Pentateuch, his son, Joseph Scaliger, had attempted to open a direct correspondence with that people themselves, and had written to their communities in Nabulus and Cairo. Answers were sent from both these places; but although dated in the year 998 of the Hejra, A. D. 1589, they never reached Scaliger, who died A. D. 1609. After passing through several hands, they came into the possession of J. Morin, who made a Latin translation of them, which was published after his death. The originals are in the Royal Library at Paris; and the text, with a more accurate version, has been published by De Sacy.

"In A. D. 1671, Robert Huntington, who was then Chaplain of the English factory at Aleppo, and died in 1701, as bishop of Raphoe, in Ireland, visited the Samaritans at Nabulus on his way to Jerusalem. They appear to have received from him, through some misapprehension, the impression that there were Samaritans in England; and he proposed to them to write to their brethren in that country, giving a summary of their doctrines and rites, and to transmit, at the same time, a copy of their law. A manuscript of the Pentateuch was accordingly put in to his hands, and a letter sent after him to Jerusalem, both of which he forwarded to England. The letter was answered by Thomas Marshal, Rector of Lincoln College, Oxford; and the correspondence there commenced continued until A. D. 1688, chiefly through Huntington, at Aleppo. This correspondence, extending to six letters from the Samaritans, so far as it has been preserved in passing piecemeal through various hands, has been first fully published by De Sacy.

"In the mean time, another correspondence had been commenced with the Samaritans at Nabulus by the celebrated Ludolf. Taking advantage of the return of a Jewish agent to Palestine in A. D. 1684, he sent by him a letter, written in Hebrew with Samaritan characters, and received from the Samaritans two letters in reply, in the same language and character, dated in 1685. These were soon published by Cellarius. Ludolf wrote again, and received another letter in 1691, which was not published until long afterwards.

"For more than a century these various letters continued to be the only source accessible to the scholars of Europe, from which a knowledge of the tenets and ceremonies of the Samaritans could be derived. In A D. 1807, the French bishop and senator Gregoire again took up the subject; and, by his influence, instructions were sent to the French consuls in the Levant to make inquiries respecting the Samaritans.

"The consul at Aleppo opened a communication with those at Nabulus, and received from them a letter in 1808, which was forwarded to Europe, written in Arabic by the priest Selameh, son of Tobias. This letter came into the hands of De Sacy, who answered for Gregoire; and received in 1811 a reply in Hebrew, written with Samaritan characters. Another letter arrived for De Sacy in 1820, and also one addressed to a supposed Samaritan community in Paris; for which likewise a second letter came in 1826. These five letters have been published by the learned Orientalist in the collection so often referred to.

"The published literature of the Samaritans, therefore, consists in the various copies of the Pentateuch in whole or in part; and of this series of their letters at four different periods, stretching through an interval of nearly two and a-half centuries. In addition to this, Gesenius discovered, in" a Samaritan manuscript in England, a curious collection of hymns, chiefly of a doctrinal nature, which he has published with a commentary. They possess also manuscripts of a work professing to be the book of Joshua, often mentioned in their letters. It has never yet been printed; but a manuscript of an Arabic version, written in the Samaritan character, was procured by Joseph Scaliger for the library of the University of Leyden. The work U a sort of chronicle, extending from Moses to the time of Alexander Severus, and, in the period parallel to the book of Joshua, has a strong affinity with that book. Accounts of their tenets and rites have been often drawn up from these various sources, to which I can only here refer.

"From the earliest letters of the Samaritans, and from the accounts of Delia Valle, it appears that two centuries ago they had small communities in Cairo, Gaza, Nabulus, and Damascus. The three former are mentioned repeatedly in their letters; the latter we know only from Delia Valle, who purchased at Damascus his copies of the Pentateuch. They seem to have been only a few families in the gardens outside of the city—perhaps a temporary establishment—and we hear no more of them. Those of Nabulus and Gaza appear to have stood in close connexion; and one of the letters to England was written from the latter place. In their first answer to the inquiries of Gregoire (A D. 1808), they say, that for more than a century there had been no Samaritans in Egypt, and that they then existed only at Nabulus and Yafa. There may have been an agent of the community, or perhaps a family or two then at Yafa; but at the time of our visit, neither they nor any one else spoke of any Samaritans except at Nabulus; our Samaritan guide certainly knew of no other. It appears to be the last isolated remnant of a remarkable people, clinging now for more than two thousand years around this central spot of their religion and history, and lingering slowly to decay, after having survived the man; revolutions and convulsions which in that long interval have swept over this unhappy land—a reed continually shaken with the wind, but bowing before the storm."¹

Of those who have visited the Samaritans, Henry Maundrell stands amongst the first. The learned Job Ludolf, of Frankfort, had prompted him to ask of the chief priest of the Samaritans various questions, which are recorded, with the answers, in his " Journey;"

¹ Biblical Researches in Palestine, etc. iii. 129-134

but he gives us little information respecting the people themselves; nor are we aware of any detailed accounts of them till within the present century.

The Rev. William Jowett, an agent of the Church Missionary Society, visited Nablous in November, 1823, and has recorded the following particulars of his "conversations with the Samaritans:"

"In the evening we visited the Samaritan priest, Shalmor Ben Tobish. He seemed surprised that we should know his name, and asked how we had heard of him. When we informed him that we knew him through previous travellers, he showed us the letter of a French gentleman who had travelled their way three or four years ago, and had sent to make certain inquiries of him.

"In a little time we were joined by various others of his people, in number about twelve. I was struck to observe that the character of the priest's physiognomy was far from Jewish. He informed us that, among this people here, some were of the tribe of Levi—namely, his own family, consisting of four boys and a girl; only this family, however, as he is the only man of that tribe. He said that there are four or the families of the tribe of Manasseh, and that all the rest are of Ephraim, excepting one, of the tribe of Benjamin, who, while we were speaking, came in. In all, they were between twenty and thirty houses. About sixty males pay the capitation-tax. We asked him, how they would supply the priesthood, in case his family should fail? Several replied together: 'It never fails.' The priest and his sons alone have the privilege of standing on the raised step before the Torah in their synagogue.

"They said there were in Nabulus a few Jewish houses, fewer than their own. To our inquiries, whether there were any other Samaritans in the world, he replied, there were—some in England, some in America, some in Banderbeshire, near India; there had been very many in France, but they were now reduced to three or four; and, finally, there were some at Sabbath. His replies were given in a manner which (p. 62) implied a desire to represent the numbers of his people as considerable, rather than in a way which at all convinced us of his knowing the condition, or even the existence, of his brethren in other countries, concerning whom he offered this information. • • •

"We begged to see the celebrated manuscript. He made many difficulties, although he readily allowed us to see the synagogue. We pressed our wishes, however; when he said there were many things previously requisite: he must first go to the bath—he must light up many candles, etc. We knew what this meant, and said that we would pay for all the candles; on which he consented to show us the manuscript next morning. We then went down into the synagogue with his son, and many of the company; but he did not accompany us. They made us take off more of our dress than I had ever been despoiled of before—both my outer and inner shoes; and my *ferwi*, a warm dress lined with fur. We saw several Samaritan manuscripts on a shelf, wrapped up in cloth: they were written on skin. On our asking their price, a young man said that they were not to be sold; that to sell them was *haram*, prohibited; and that every letter was worth a sequin. The Samaritan character they call *Ebrani*; and refuse the type which we call Hebrew, as an innovation.

"Early the following morning, according to appointment, we visited the Samaritan priest. We waited for him some time; during which we placed in order our Bibles, and selected some texts on which we desired to converse with him. At length he made his appearance, and accompanied us into the synagogue. With great reverence he produced the venerable manuscript, which, he said, was written by Abisha, grandson of Aaron,

thirteen years after the death of Moses, now 3,460 years ago. We were not permitted to touch the sacred book, but only to look at it, at about a foot distance. The page at which he opened showed, certainly, a very ancient manuscript, with the characters jet sufficiently distinct. He then showed us another of a similar form—apparently an exact copy—which, he said, was 800 years old. •••

"We inquired in which direction they turn their faces when they pray; he waved his hand in the direction a little right of the angle behind the altar, that is, nearly southward. In this direction is the city of Luz, which afterwards was called Bethel: the place which the Lord appointed to set his name there. We went out, and he directed his hand toward the hill Gerizim, to a point a little beyond which is the spot whither they go 'to bless.'

It may be observed, that the Samaritans here, according to the account given of their tribes, are all within the enumeration of those six tribes mentioned Deut. xxvii. 12, 13, whose lot it was to repeat the blessings; the other six being appointed to curse on Mount Ebal. He also directed his hand toward the spot where those were to stand who were appointed to curse. We asked if the report was true that, in any way, they worshipped the symbol of a dove—looking, at the same time, to see if the emblem of the dove was anywhere to be seen on the curtain which screens the altar, as some have said. He replied, 'It is a falsehood of the Jews, who endeavour to calumniate us.' As to Jerusalem, they have no respect for it as a holy city, regarding the Jews as their rivals, and speaking entirely in the spirit of the woman of Samaria, 'Our fathers worshipped in this mountain.'—John iv. 20.

"We then produced a few passages in the Pentateuch, concerning which we desired to know his opinion, whether or no they referred to the Messiah. 'I will put enmity,' etc., Gen. iii. 15, he said, did *not* refer to the Messiah. 'The sceptre shall not depart,' etc., Gen. xlix. 10, they consider as a prophecy of the Messiah, who is Shiloh; and, when pressed on the circumstance that the sceptre had already departed from Judah, he gave the explanation which many of the Jews give, that Judah has always hitherto existed and still exists somewhere in the world, exercising regal authority; although he acknowledged that he did not know where. On coming out, we asked how long this synagogue had been occupied by them; he pointed to a small marble slab inserted in the wall, engraven with Samaritan characters, which, he said, recorded the period of their occupying this building—now 490 years. There were two or three other slabs, with Samaritan characters, inserted in like manner in the wall. That which records the date of their possession of the synagogue, is in a small recess on the left side of the door. We understood him to say that they have no daily sacrifice; but, on a subsequent occasion, the chief layman of the Samaritans told me, that at the Passover they still sacrifice and eat the paschal lamb.

"The house of this priest, and the synagogue which adjoins it, are very clean—a perfect contrast to the inveterate filth of the Jewish houses and synagogues which we had seen at Tiberius and Safet, one only excepted, that of the Austrian consul at Tiberius. Whether this be owing to the national character of the Samaritans—if *national* be a term applicable to a hundred persons or whether it is owing to their being in tolerably easy circumstances, or whether it is the case with the priest's house alone, which was the only one we visited, it is not in our power to judge.

"The priest, in a very friendly manner, asked us to take up our lodging with him for the night, as we had done on the evening before; but we desired to leave at noon, and, therefore, bid him farewell. He desired us to join our fingers together with his, in token,

as he said, that the English were his friends; adding, that he wished to be considered as under English protection." ²

Fifteen years later, that is, in 1838, they were visited by Dr. Robinson from the United States; and the account he gives of this fragment of a nation is equally interesting.

"One of our first objects at Nabulus was to visit the Samaritans, that singular and feeble remnant of an ancient people, which, to this day, has survived the storms of ages and of adverse influences, upon their native soil. Some men, formerly from Beirut, soon came around us ; and an old Christian, of the Greek rite, undertook to conduct us to the Samaritans, to the summit of Mount Gerizim, and to Jacob's Well. We repaired to the city, passing among luxuriant groves of fig and other fruit trees, and entering by a gate at the western end. The quarter occupied by the Samaritans is in the south-west part of the city, rising somewhat upon the acclivity of Gerizim. It is well built, and the houses seemed solid and comfortable. On coming to the synagogue we found it closed. Several of the Samaritans came to us; but as the priest was not at hand to open the door, we could not now visit the synagogue. They offered us a guide, however, to the top of Mount Gerizim; we determined to go thither immediately, and see the priest on our return. * * * We returned down the mountain by the same route; occupying twenty minutes to the brow of the descent, and twenty minutes thence to the city. We now found the Samaritan priest and several of his people waiting for us in the little court before their synagogue and school-room. The priest seemed about sixty years old, with a shrewd, intelligent expression of countenance, and a manner which would command influence anywhere. His son, now sub-priest, perhaps thirty-five years of age, seemed in all respects to be of a more ordinary character. The priest wore an external robe of red silk, with a white turban; the others had mostly red turbans. In other particulars their dress was similar to the usual costume of the country. Their common language of intercourse, among themselves and with others, is the Arabic. They were very civil and polite; answered readily all our inquiries respecting themselves, their customs, and their faith; and asked many questions, especially the priest, respecting America, and particularly if there were any Samaritans in that country. We did not understand them as believing that other colonies of Samaritans actually exist there or elsewhere; but they seemed to have the idea that such a thing was possible, and were anxious to learn the true state of the case.

"The priest said they have many books of prayers, and commentaries, and the like, in their ancient language and character; which character they call el-Ebry (the Hebrew), in distinction from that used by the Jews, which they call el-Kashury. They have a copy of the first volume of Wilton's Polyglott; and, in the course of conversation, the priest acknowledged to us the correctness of the Samaritan Pentateuch; contained in it.

"They complained, as usual, of the Jewish corruptions of the text; and dwelt upon the superior purity, both of their text and of their observance of the law.

"After considerable conversation, the priest at length rose (p. 63) and opened the door of their *Keniseh* (the Arabic word for both church and synagogue), and we all entered, taking off our shoes. It is a small, plain, arched room, with a recess on the left hand at entering, where their manuscripts are kept, before which a curtain is suspended. We noticed no figure of a dove or of other objects. We inquired after the noted manuscript which they professed was now 3,460 years old, referring it to Abishua, the son of

² Jowett's " Christian Researches," etc., pp. 195-201.

Phineas. The priest brought out a manuscript from the recess, rolled on two rods, in the usual Jewish form; but it turned out to be written in a modern hand and on new parchment. When this was pointed out, the old man laughed, and produced another, which he and the rest all said was the true one. It was certainly very much worn, and somewhat tattered with use and much kissing, and here and there patched with shreds of parchment; but the handwriting appeared to me very similar to the former, and the vellum seemed, in like manner, not ancient. Of course we were not permitted to handle or touch it; and whatever may be its real age, it is very probably the manuscript which has usually been shown to former travellers and excited their wonder.

"They professed to have about a hundred manuscripts; and the priest said that he employs himself in writing out copies of the law. When asked if they would sell a copy, the answer was, ' Yes, for fifty thousand piastres.'

"The Samaritans are now reduced to a very small community, there being only thirty men who pay taxes, and few, if any, are exempt; so that their whole number cannot be reckoned at over one hundred and fifty souls. One of them is in affluent circumstances; and having been for a long time chief secretary of the Mutesellim of Nabulus, became one of the most important and powerful men of the province. He had recently been superseded in his influence with the governor by a Copt, and now held only the second place. He was called el' Abd-es-Samary. The rest of the Samaritans are not remarkable either for their wealth or poverty. The physiognomy of those we saw was not Jewish; nor, indeed, did we remark in it any peculiar character, as distinguished from that of other natives of the country. They keep the Saturday as their Sabbath with great strictness, allowing no labour nor trading, not even cooking nor lighting a fire, but resting from their employments the whole day. On Friday evening they pray in their houses; and on Saturday have public prayers in their synagogues at morning, noon, and evening. They meet, also, in the synagogue on the great festivals, and on the new moons; but not every day. The law is read in public, not every Sabbath-day, but only upon the same festivals."

We are not aware that this remnant of Samaritans has been visited of late by any travellers interested in their past history or protracted existence. M. de Sauley, as stated in a former paper, visited, in 1851, the old site of Samaria, and the modern town of Naplouse; but he was more occupied with the mouldering ruins than with the living antiquities of this most interesting locality. We learn from him incidentally that numbers " of that strange sect" were still resident there; and that he sent a message of inquiry, respecting the name of some ancient remains, "to the high priest of the Samaritans." But we have no other information respecting them from his pen.

It is not impossible, that from so reduced und depressed a race a strong community may yet arise; for the sons of Jacob, when they went with their father into Egypt, were a still more feeble band. But the probability is, that as they have disappeared from Gaza, Cairo, and Damascus, so they will continue to waste away, till the last Samaritan shall sleep with his fathers.

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