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Notes on the Lajâ

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made by bleaching out the photographs. The time from date of taking the photographs to delivering the map was twenty-seven days, which included fixing several plane-table points (fifteen days), collecting names, checking streets, etc. Most of the trig. work had been done previously.

A map of Damascus city is also sent. It is on the 1/5000 scale, accurately fitted to trig. points, and reproduced as a photograph with all essentials emphasized and useless detail washed out. This too can be seen in the R.G.S. map room.

The *Geog. Journal* of May 1919 gives an instance where aerophotography led to the discovery of an ancient city. A similar result has been obtained in the Fayum in Egypt.

In the Survey of Egypt, Captain F. S. Richards, Captain J. H. Cole, Mr. H. Rowntree, and Mr. J. Douglas have special knowledge gained during the war on various technical points connected with the subject, and, with the encouragement and assistance of the Surveyor-General of Egypt, have helped greatly in the writing of this report, in which several points have been omitted for brevity's sake.

NOTES ON THE LAJÂ

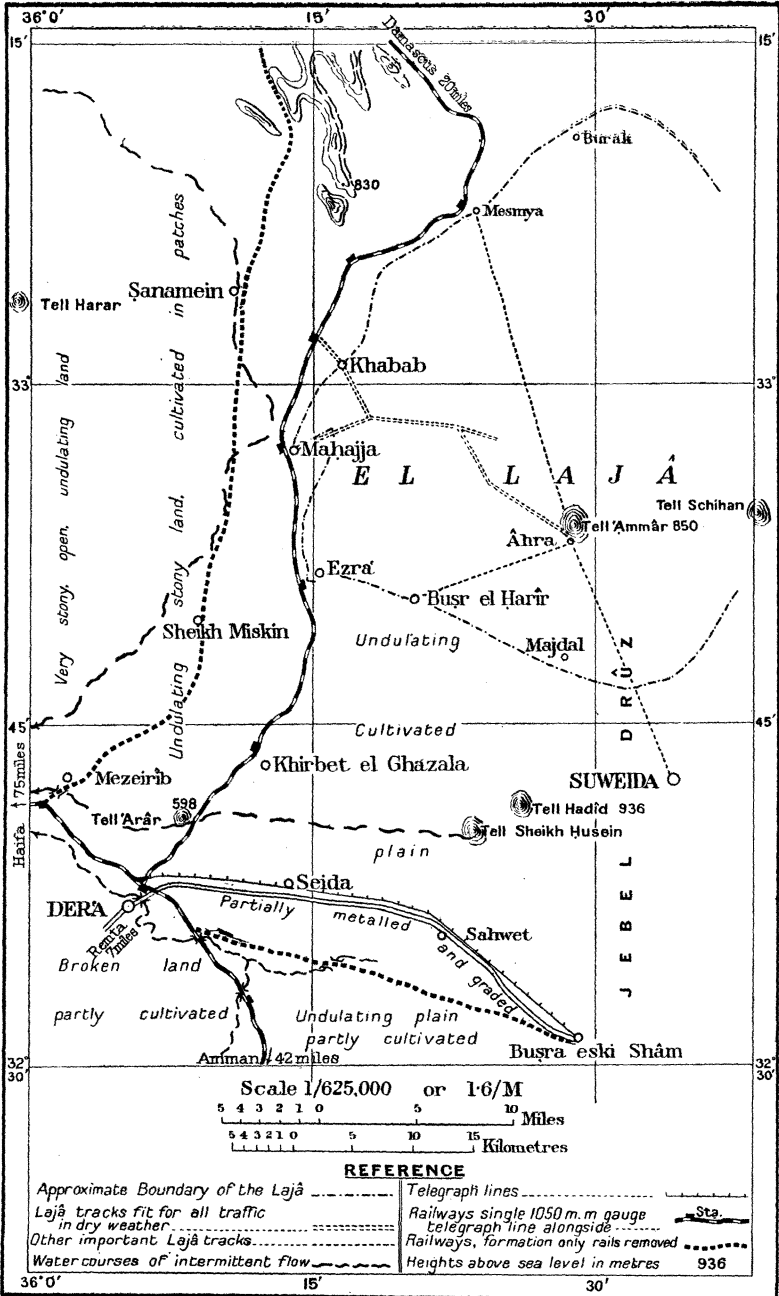
Lieut. Annesley Voysey, R.E.

THE following notes are compiled from data collected during November 1919. As far as possible only information applying exclusively to the Lajâ has been included, and no attempt has been made to describe Syrian and Arab life in general. Such descriptions may readily be found elsewhere. The accompanying map has been provisionally compiled from the Turkish map (scale 1/200,000) recently obtained from Constantinople, and from work done in the Horân in November and December 1919, under the direction of Lieut.-Col. Newcombe, D.S.O., R.E. Only the more important villages and those mentioned in the text are shown. The spelling of the place-names is on the system adopted by the Survey of Egypt. For the figures giving the approximate population of the Lajâ I am indebted to Major Somerset, at one time Chief Political Officer at Der'a.

Topography.—The rocks of the Lajâ rise like mountains in miniature, 20 feet to 30 feet above the surrounding country. Many are the travellers' tales told regarding the impassability of this region, its sterility, and the savage ways of the inhabitants. But these difficulties appear considerably less on a closer examination of the conditions.

Though the majority of the tracks across the Lajâ are hardly distinguishable, except by the practised native eye, from the surrounding chaos of disintegrated lava, there is an excellent road through the centre

of this region (see map) that is considerably better than most of those of



the surrounding country. For to the north, south, and west of the Lajā stretches an undulating plain covered in varying degrees with jagged

grey stones of a coarse and porous basalt. To the east rise the hills of *Jebel Drûz*, likewise covered in part with loose rock. Round about the villages that lie within these rocky areas the stones have been cleared away and stacked in great heaps by the peasants in their efforts at cultivation, but large tracts of uncleared land still remain, and through them movement is exceedingly difficult. For wheeled transport these areas are absolutely impassable. The *Lajâ* track mentioned above, however, is a well-made earth road, most probably of late Roman workmanship, averaging 9 feet wide, and carried across several of the small depressions on well-built dry stone embankments. With a very little work this road could be made fit for light cars in dry weather, though, having a surface of heavy loam, it would be impassable after rain for wheeled traffic of every description. The remains of other Roman roads, both in the *Lajâ* and in the *Horân*, are mentioned by *Burckhardt* and others, but the one described above seems up till now to have escaped notice.

In form this region resembles an expanse of sand-dunes, having very few graded wadis, the depressions being cup-shaped and undrained. The few wadis that do exist are broad and shallow and easily crossed. The lava that entirely covers the country is now mostly disintegrated and broken up into jagged and grotesque-shaped basalt boulders, though in places smoother patches of rock, full of the holes caused by gas and air bubbles, may be seen, showing how the lava cooled as it flowed over the inequalities of the ground. Deep fissures in the earth, sometimes forming caves and reservoirs, may also be found, and through these the lava was most probably ejected. The hills to the east are undoubtedly volcanic in form, but the general formation and situation of the *Lajâ* suggest that the lava welled up from below rather than poured down from above.

Here and there in the hollows the stone has been cleared away, and crops of wheat and barley sown. These cultivated patches are more common on the west and south-west borders of the *Lajâ* than elsewhere. The soil where thus exposed is seen to be a rich red loam—like that of the *Horân*—and the crops produced are healthy and vigorous.

On the north, west, and south-west sides of the *Lajâ* lie strips of cleared and cultivated ground, but to the east and south are stony stretches, making the cliff-like edge of the *Lajâ* less well defined.

Water Supply.—Throughout the *Lajâ* are the ruins of numerous towns and villages, consisting of well-built stone houses, evidences of the Roman occupation of the country. The population thus indicated is somewhat larger than the present one, yet the water supply to-day is only just adequate for their scanty needs. At *Majdal* there stands a well-preserved and almost complete Roman dwelling, under the paved courtyard of which is a large reservoir, to which access is provided by an aperture in the centre of the court. This court is about 15 yards square, and the reservoir is said to extend under the whole of it. It is probable

that every house of any considerable size had at that period a similar reservoir, filled during the winter rains, and providing the family and their dependants with water for the remainder of the year. Nowadays, however, these elaborate reservoirs have fallen into disrepair, and the only water obtainable is that which collects in the hollows of the ground and in the open rectangular cisterns to be found in all the villages, together with the supply from a very few wells and springs (see list of villages).

The Rev. W. Ewing, in his book 'Arab and Druze at Home,' suggests that the water supply for the ancient population of the Lajâ was stored in the numerous caves and hollows amongst the rocks. Whatever means were taken to preserve the supply, it is apparent, from the evidences of the work done by the ancients in constructing cisterns, that the supply was then, as it is now, chiefly dependent upon the rainfall. The statement regarding the "copious fountains" made in Murray's Handbook appears somewhat exaggerated; while Cook (Handbook), who states that the only spring in the Lajâ is one near Dâma, certainly underrates the supply.

Climate.—This is similar to that of the surrounding districts, except that during the autumn and winter mists are far more frequent over the Lajâ. On two out of three days a thick white mist lies over the rocks, which, while not preventing travelling, completely obliterates the landscape.

Inhabitants.—Nowadays the majority of the villages in the Lajâ consist of the ruins of Roman-built dwellings, amongst the walls of which the Lajâ Bedawin pitch their tents. This Bedawin population consists of the Şulût tribe, numbering about 5000 persons, and the Fahsa, about whom little is at present known. Both these tribes are semi-nomadic. Certain of the villages on the eastern and south-eastern edges of the Lajâ have, however, been kept in better repair, and these are occupied by a Drûz fellahin population (numbering about 10,000 persons). It must be understood that though these good people are fellahin in the sense that they are not nomadic, they combine with the tilling of the soil the purveying of other people's property. And some of them make a very comfortable living of it. Nor are they in the least ashamed of their profession. There is an antagonism between this semi-fellahin Drûz and the Lajâ Bedawin, based upon religious differences, but not so great an antagonism as that which exists between the Lajâ and the surrounding country. For, owing to its nature, the Lajâ has for many centuries been the refuge of the outcasts from society. (The word Lajâ signifies in Arabic "a refuge.") And once having become an inhabitant of this region, it is impossible, for economic reasons, for a man to desist from appropriating the fruits of the labours of others. For the land will yield neither sufficient grain nor sufficient grazing for the support of the present population and their flocks; so that, apart from reasons connected with the hereditary antagonism between nomad and fellahin, and between Drûz and Moslem and Christian, the Lajâ people rob their neighbours to balance their

accounts. The villages that surround the Lajâ, therefore—especially those having a Christian population—suffer continually from raids, in which sheep and cattle invariably change hands and lives are not infrequently lost.

The wholesome regard which the late Turkish Government had for the Lajâ and its inhabitants is evidenced by the fact that on the comparatively recent Turkish map of Syria (referred to in para. 1) the Lajâ is shown merely in rough outline with a few place-names scattered indeterminately over the area. No Turkish surveyor could trust himself within its borders. For a similar reason this same map extends only to the western border of Jebel Drûz, not a single detail of this mountainous region being definitely fixed.

When we wished to cross the Lajâ from Maḥajja to 'Ahra it was only with great difficulty that local transport was obtained. No man would volunteer, even for high wages, to accompany us, on account, so we were told, of a blood-feud that was then running between themselves and one of the Şulûṭ sub-tribes; and all were fearful of trusting their animals to us. Even the gendarmes, who had received orders from their headquarters to accompany us, were only made to come by being threatened with the personal displeasure of a certain royal personage.

But at 'Ahra and Majdal, as well as at Maḥajja (ex Lajâ), we were received and entertained by the mukhtars with true Arab hospitality. Shortly after the arrival of the guests the neighbours would assemble round the coffee fire in the guest chamber, their presence serving the double purpose of doing honour to the visitors and gratifying their curiosity. Nor did the guests' retiring to bed in a corner of the chamber cause any slackening in interest on the part of the audience. Indeed, it rather heightened it; and every part of the proceedings was watched with solemn interest and received with polite murmurs of approval.

The meals, which were on a scale rather more elaborate than that of the everyday fare, consisted of boiled chicken, rice, bread, samn (butter in a liquid form), leban (butter milk), burghal (wheat, boiled in water and sun-dried), grapes, and dibs (grape sugar in the form of a thick syrup). The principal meal was served soon after sunset, while breakfast, a very slight affair, was provided on the guests' account only, since the Arab never takes it. The food, most excellently cooked, was served in copper dishes, tinned on the inside, with a few spoons and plates provided in deference to the guests' strange habits.

The clothes worn by all the Lajâ people are similar to those worn in other parts of Syria, though the Bedawin, belonging to poor and semi-nomadic tribes, are somewhat more disreputable in appearance than the real nomadic Bedawin.

At Majdal and a few of the villages in Jebel Drûz there used to be English schools, at which, though a general education was given, but little English seems to have been taught. The Mudir at Majdal had himself

been educated at one of these. He reported that ten or twelve years ago they had all been suppressed by the Turkish Government. The origin of these schools could not be traced. Reference is made to one of these schools in Jebel Drûz, but no light is thrown upon its origin.

Porter mentions that, in addition to Şulût, the Bedawin tribes of the Lajâ consist of the Medlej, Selmân, Dhohery, and Siyaleh. Murray also mentions the Medlej, while Burckhardt speaks of tribes other than the Şulût in the Lajâ.

Architecture.—The ruins that form the basis of every Lajâ village and encampment are those of stone-built houses and temples, some belonging to the pre-Roman period and some erected by the Romans during their occupation of the country. Many of the buildings are well preserved, and the whole region is deserving of careful research. For the construction of the more modern houses dressed and carved stones from amongst the ruins have been employed. Many of the constructional details of the ancient buildings are especially interesting, while everywhere are to be found doors and window shutters, cut from the solid stone, of all sizes from 3 to 10 feet in height. Much research has been carried out among the ancient buildings in the Horân and Jebel Drûz, but little has as yet been done in the Lajâ, where the buildings are similar to, and offer perhaps as wide a range of interest as, those already investigated. Descriptions of the architecture, both domestic and religious, of the Horân, together with copies of inscriptions found carved upon the stones, are given by the Comte de Vogüé, *Syrie Centrale, Architecture civile et religieuse de 1^{re} au 7^{me} siècle* (1865-77) and by Miss Gertrude Bell, *The Desert and the Sown* (1907).

Supplies.—Both wheat and barley are grown in small quantities, while scanty grazing for sheep, goats, and camels can be found nearly everywhere. Numerous wild flowers grow in the crannies amongst the rocks. A few fruit trees (olives, apricots, and pears) grow in the neighbourhood of some of the villages on the edge of the Lajâ, but otherwise this region is entirely treeless. This lack of building timber has doubtless given rise to the elaborate stone architecture. Stock, consisting of sheep, goats, cattle, camels (baggage camels only), ponies, donkeys, and mules, are owned by every village and tribe, while fowls and pigeons may be found in most of the villages. The pigeons are kept for the excellent manure that they provide for the land. Owing to the nature of the country as a whole no wheeled vehicles are employed, the best means of transport being the locally bred camels, ponies, mules, and donkeys. For fuel, dried cakes of dung, and scrub collected with great labour by the women, are employed, as elsewhere.

Throughout the Lajâ there are great quantities of partridge, quails, hares, and rabbits, while other but less useful fauna are foxes, jackals, a few hyænas, lizards, snakes, eagles, vultures, and many different species of small birds.

At Khabab and Maḥajja, where the stone is of a specially suitable quality, millstones are manufactured and exported to Damascus, Der'a, and those nearer villages fortunate enough to have running water. These stones, varying from about 3 to 6 feet in diameter, are chipped from the solid rock with chisel and hammer.

At 'Ahra and Majdal are steam-driven flour mills, grain being brought from the villages for miles around. The owners of these mills are, as might be expected, making fabulous fortunes, he at Majdal turning over profits exceeding 10,000 Turkish pounds yearly.

Burckhardt mentions the manufacture of saltpetre in the Lajâ, and its export to Damascus and other towns. Nothing definite was heard regarding its manufacture to-day. The numerous stunted trees referred to in books have now almost entirely disappeared, as the forests on the slopes of Jebel Drûz are rapidly doing.

Place-names in the Lajâ.

(i.) The following names and populations have been verified :

	<i>Approximate Population.</i>			<i>Total.</i>	
	<i>Mohd.</i>	<i>Christian.</i>	<i>Druse.</i>		
'Ahra	—	—	400	400	Spring.
Buṣr el Ḥarîr	1500	—	—	1500	
Dâma el 'Ālya	—	—	400	400	
El Meleîha el Gharbiya	300	—	—	300	
El Mesmya	20	300	—	320	(Hdqrs. of Qaḏâf.)
El Şawara el Kebîra ...	—	—	600	600	
El Şawara el Şaghîra	—	—	600	600	
Ezra'	800	500	—	1300	(Hdqrs. of Qaḏâf.)
Ḥarrân	—	—	300	300	
Ḥazm	—	—	550	550	
Jedya	—	—	100	100	
Jideil	75	—	—	75	
Jurein	—	—	200	200	
Khabab	—	900	—	900	Wells. Good supply for
Khâlidiya	—	—	600	600	[whole year.]
Khilkhîla	—	—	500	500	
Lubbein	—	—	200	200	
Maḥajja	1200	—	—	1200	Wells.
Majâdel	100	—	—	100	
Majâdel	—	—	100	100	
Majdal	—	100	400	500	Spring. 1 ml. south
Mutûna	—	—	400	400	
Najîh	100	—	—	100	
Nejrân	—	—	500	500	
Rîmet el Luḥf... ..	—	—	1000	1000	
Ruteîma	—	—	600	600	
Şalâkhed	—	—	100	100	
Şagara	—	300	—	300	Spring.
Sijn	20	100	800	920	
Şumeid	—	—	200	200	
Şûr	300	—	—	300	Well, small supply.
Suweimra	—	—	100	100	
Umm el Zeitûn	—	—	300	300	
Umm Ḥârtein	—	—	500	500	

Except where otherwise mentioned, the water supply is derived from cisterns and birqas.

(ii.) The following place-names are mentioned by the Rev. W. Ewing

("A Journey in the Hauran," *P.E.F. Quarterly Statement*, 1905) in addition to many in List (i.). They probably refer to the ruined villages that now only shelter the Bedawin tribes. Mr. Ewing's spelling is adhered to.

Abrâk	Et'ârah
Ardhîmeh	Hadur
'Åsem	Hâmir
*Bî'r Jafir	Kala'
Bûrt	Kaşr Habîbeh
Dajâj	*Kâşr Jenin
Dakîr (Dhakir?)	Kaşûr Barghashah
Deir Damet el Barrâneh	Kaşûr el Hômah
" " Juâneh	Kâşr Zobair
Deir Nîleh	Khîrbet er Raşif
Ed Dawîreh	Kiratah
Eib	Kôm Mâsik
Ekrîm	*Kôm Rômân
El Jisreh	Lâhneh
El Khirseh	Lubweir
El Wabeir	Mrasras
Er Rasîmeh	Umm Sâtisah
Esh'ârah	Waqm
Esmâh	Zubeir
Esmîd	Zubîreh

ANTARCTIC METEOROLOGY

British Antarctic Expedition, 1910-1913. Meteorology. Vol. 1, Discussion. Vol. 2, Charts.— G. C. Simpson, D.Sc., F.R.S. Calcutta: Printed by Thacker, Spink & Co. 1919. Vol. 1, pp. xii. + 326.

DR. SIMPSON obtained leave from the Indian Meteorological Service to accompany Captain Scott on his last expedition, and returning after one year at the Cape Evans base he undertook the discussion of the meteorological results of the expedition, the delay in completing the work being due to the War. The delay would have been still longer but for the decision to print the volumes in India, and it ought to be placed on record that the typography is singularly free from errors. A third volume containing the statistical data on which the discussions and charts are based is promised later. This is a break with tradition; and it soon appears, in turning over the pages of the discussion, that Dr. Simpson is no slave to established ways of doing things. He is original in his method of treating data, and his somewhat daring hypotheses are set forth with attractive directness and clearness. One might be tempted to think that he is satisfied with framing a hypothetical statement which is not contradicted by the available data, instead of deducing a theory which is demonstrated by the observed facts. But we must bear in mind that if demonstration were required it might be necessary to wait a century or two for the collection of adequate data, whereas Dr. Simpson presents us now with a connected explanation of Antarctic meteorology, which though avowedly incomplete, will stimulate future investigations.

We do not propose here to enter into the more technically meteorological aspects of the discussion, nor to weigh the probability that the explanations offered are sufficient and permanent. We wish rather to call attention to the new light thrown on the physical geography of the Antarctic region with reference to earlier views.

* Villages marked thus have good water.