ʿIRĀQ AL-MANSHIYYAH

Is. Gr. 129 112 (N. Is. Gr. 179 612)

Shrine of Shaykh Aḥmad al-ʿArīnī (al-ʿUraynī)

ʿIrāq al-Manshiyeh (colloq. al-Manshiyyeh) was a village 10km. west of Bayt Jubrīn (presently the town of Kiryat Gat). The Arabic عراق and عراق is transliterated in literature in a few different ways (all with good reasons) as ʿArāq al-Manshiyeh, (Mayer, QDAP, 1:42; SWP, 3:259, 266) Eʿrāk el-Manshiyyeh (Clermont Ganneau, AR, 2:55, 56, 281) which is the colloquial pronunciation of ʿArāq; ʿArak (ibid., 34); Aʿrāk (ibid., 261-263). To the north of the village there is a high and steep tell called Tell ʿAreinī after a local saint, Shaykh Aḥmad al-ʿArīnī (also spelt: al-ʿAreinī and al-ʿUrainī (Mayer, ibid.; Mayer, Heraldry, 1933: 62) whose ruined shrine is situated on the top of the tell. (Fig. P76) The shrine was already in ruin in 1932 when Mayer published the inscriptions from it (QDAP, loc. cit.; Heraldry, loc. cit. See below.) For sometime, the tell was identified as the site of the Philistine city-state of Gath (1Sam.27:2), but extensive excavations carried out by the IAA and the Oriental Institute of Rome found no Philistine traces on the site, and the city of Gath was re-identified at the site of Tell aṣ-Ṣāfī (Is. Gr. 135 112 N.Is. Gr, 185 623). The five seasons of excavations in Tel al-ʿAreinī (1956-1961) headed by S. Yeivin and in 1985, 1987 and 1988 by Kempinski from the University of Tel Aviv, discovered several fortified settlements and material from the Chalcolitic period until the Byzantine period. The material of Egyptian origin was of special interest as it provided important information about the relations with Egypt throughout the early Canaanite period (early 3rd millennium BCE), in addition to material from the Iron Age, and the Persian and Roman-Byzantine periods.

The PEF surveyors (1875), though very impressed by the “mound” (250 feet high in flat surroundings) thought that it was not an artificial tell. They described the village...
as “a mud village on a flat plain ...” and “the curious mound north of it ... consisting of a natural rock.” They did not investigate the “sacred Muslim maqâm” on its top (SWP, 3:259, 266), and they evidently did not see the inscriptions, for they could not have been missed. Two inscriptions, commemorating the work of the same builder, were found embedded in the wall of the maqâm, (Fig. P76) and published by Mayer.

A slab of limestone, 0.40x0.52m., embedded in the northern wall of the maqâm to the left of the entrance door. 6 lines, professional, provincial Mamlûk naskhî points, signs and ornaments in open spaces between the letters; in relief. The inscription is not in situ, and seems to have been brought to the place from the nearby khân. Fig. 112. Publication: Mayer, QDAP 1, 1931:42-43; RCEA, 14:118, No. 5385.

Basmalah. Blessed be He who, if He willeth, will appoint for thee something better than that—gardens through which the rivers flow; and will appoint for thee castles (Q. 25:31. Trans. Bell) Has ordered the building of this blessed khân (caravanserai) the slave who is in need of Allah, the Exalted, the ḥājî Al Malik one of the amîrs in the land of Egypt, and this (took place) in the year 717(=1317)

L.1: Mayer did not see the word الله written in small letters above بسم

Mayer already drew attention to the fact that the present inscription and the following one were not in situ. Not only are there no traces of a caravanserai on the tell, but also the site itself is very unsuitable for a khân, the area being of a limited size on the top, and because of the steepness of the tell. One has to look for the nearest possible khân, from the ruins of which the inscribed stone could have been obtained. Mayer suggests that the khân could only be the one which was supposedly built in Umm Lâqîs—a wrong spelling of the original name Mulâqîs confirmed by the medieval name Melaques and Melagues. (See discussion by Clermont Ganneau, AR, 2: 438 and CIAP 2:117-119.) This assumption is wrong as we shall soon see. The stone could not have been brought from the nearby village since Irāq al-Manshiyyah