

CHAPTER I.

THE KADA, OR PROVINCE OF IRBID, ITS NAMES,
DIVISIONS, AND BOUNDARIES.

THE country described in the following Memoir covers an area of about 220 English square miles, and forms part, politically, of the great Kaimakâmiyeh, or Kada, of Irbid, one of the districts subordinate to the Liva (or Province) of Haurân. It is governed by a Kaimakâm, or Lieutenant-Governor, the subordinate Government Officials and the Mejlis el-Adâra, or Administrative Council, which last is chosen from among the most prominent Sheikhs of the villages in the district. A military force of some 40 mounted soldiers, "Khayyâleh el-Mireh," and some Zaptiyehs, or Police, are also at the disposal of the Kaimakâm.

The Kada of Irbid is bounded on the north by the Yarmûk River and the country of Jaulân; on the east in part by the Wâd* esh-Shelâleh and the

* The final "y" in the word "Wâdy," when it stands before a vowel, is often omitted in the modern dialects. Mr. Schumacher's transcription has in these cases been preserved as giving the present usage.—EDITOR.

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Haurân province, in part by the Syrian desert ; on the south by the Wâd ez-Zerka and the Belka Province ; and on the west by the Ghôr of the Jordan, forming part of the Government of Tabariyeh (Tiberias Province).

The Kada of Irbid is subdivided into several districts called Nâhiyet (in the plural, in Arabic, called Nawâhy): and the following five Nâhiyets are for the most part included in the map of the country surveyed :—

1. Nâhiyet es-Siru,
2. „ el-Kefarât,
3. „ el-Wustîyeh,
4. „ of the Beni Juhma,
5. „ el-Kûra.

The southern half of the Kada of Irbid, lying between Tibneh and Kala't 'Ajlûn is called Jebel 'Ajlûn, and from it the Kada of Irbid is often spoken of as the Kada of 'Ajlûn, a name more often found in the descriptions of European travellers than heard in the mouths of the natives. In order to avoid mistakes it should be clearly understood that the name of Jebel 'Ajlûn is in no case given to those parts of the Kada of Irbid lying *north* of Tibneh (as wrongly printed in Van de Velde's Map, and others), but only to the

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tract lying between the Wâdy et-Tibn and the Wâd ez-Zerka. The Nâhiyets north of the Wâd et-Tibn up to the Yarmûk, taken collectively, bear no official name, and in calling these "Northern 'Ajlân" I have been prompted by the wish to make this tract of country (that given in the present Map) familiar to my readers under a single denomination.

GENERAL PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS.

The geological formation, and, as a consequence, the soil and the general appearance of the Kada Irbid, differs entirely from what is found in Haurân and Jaulân. The rich lava soil of Haurân, formed by the ancient volcanic outbursts of the region of Jaulân, extends but little south of the Yarmûk. According to Dr. Nœtling's Observations ("Zeit der D. Palästina Vereins," Band ix., 1886), the lava streams which took their rise in the high plateau of the Jaulân made their way down the Yarmûk Valley, and after forming two terraces, one in the upper height and the other in the lower along the slopes, finally spread over the Ghôr of the Jordan, near Tâket el-'Elu and El 'Adeisÿeh. With these streams the volcanic region comes to an end, and a less fertile, yellowish-

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white, calcareous formation follows southwards, and continues over the whole of Northern 'Ajlûn. The rock of this formation is generally a species of crumbling-limestone, and is far inferior for building purposes to the basaltic stone of Haurân. In the Nâhiyets of the Beni Juhma and of El Kûra, a common kind of marble is found. The poor nature of the building stone is probably the cause why the ancient sites of 'Ajlûn are in such a ruinous state, and afford so few remains to reward the search of the explorer; the architectural details also (and for the same reason) are less perfect and less rich than those which meet the eye among the ruins of the Haurân.

The deep valleys of Northern 'Ajlûn are so numerous that the character of the plateau land is almost masked, although the altitudes of the various sections differ but little one from the other, and the rise of the ground level is continuous. The rise is gradual from the west eastwards; from the Ghôr, 700 to 800 feet below the sea, to the plains round Meru and Beit Râs, which lies 1,931 feet above the sea level. In its extension from north to south, the land rises from the Yarmûk River, where it has an average height of a few hundred feet below the surface of the Mediterranean, up towards the narrow shoulder between Umm Keis (+ 1,193 feet) and Ibdar

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(+ 1,608 feet), this being the watershed between the Yarmûk River and the Wâd el-'Arab. From this point the section shows a remarkable depression running across the wide Wâd el-'Arab, while further east it remains nearly on a level as far as the borders of Wâd et-Tibn (+ 1,500 feet). From here the ground makes a rapid ascent to the high lands of Tibneh (+ 2,013 feet), which are the most conspicuous heights on the present Map, and thence rises again, in regular terraces, which extend across Jebel 'Ajlûn and on as far as its southern borders.

The most important depression on the present Map is formed by the Wâd el-'Arab and its tributaries. This river, which flows in a rapid stream down a narrow bed between limestone rocks, runs for the greater part at a level below that of the Mediterranean. In its winding course from east to west it forms the main stream of Northern 'Ajlûn, and receives in its bed all the winter torrents which flow down between its northern watershed and the Wâd et-Taiyibeh. The Wâd el-'Arab is the great water power and reservoir of this part of 'Ajlûn, for with its tributary, the Wâdy Zahar, it supplies all the needs of the inhabitants, turning their mills, and affording them watering and bathing places. No other valley in this country can rival it in fertility, for all the other Wâdies

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(with the exception of the almost inaccessible Wâdy Samar) run dry in summer, or preserve at most but a few unimportant springs. The inhabitants of other Wâdies, therefore, are generally in lack of good drinking water, and are, as a rule, obliged to provide for their wants from the water found in the more or less filthy cisterns which lie scattered over the length and breadth of the country, and which are a heritage come down to them from their predecessors in possession. The numerous ancient cisterns, and the aqueduct which in old times was built to supply Umm Keis from a great distance with spring water, go to prove that from the earliest epoch this district of the Decapolis was poor in spring water, a feature which finds its explanation geologically in the cleft formation of the rock, of which the country is formed, which is unsuited to collect or retain for any length of time the supplies of water which pour down on the land during the rainy season.

The watershed between the Wâd el-'Arab and the Yarmûk (and the Wâdy Samar) follows a line running from Umm Keis, at 1,200 feet, to a culminating point lying east of Ibdar, at a height of about 1,800 feet above the sea, and forms a narrow shoulder falling abruptly off towards the north and south. Characteristic of this watershed are the long narrow side spurs (as at Dhahr el-Ahmâr,

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and elsewhere), which extend northwards down to the Yarmûk Valley, the deep ravines in between showing many curious landslips, as those at 'Arâk el-Heitaliyeh and at other spots. From near Ibdar the watershed continues eastward to near 'Ain et-Turâb, and then follows the range of hills above Beit Râs and on to Irbid, and, trending still further south-east, passes outside the limits of the present Map. On the south, the line of watershed begins near Tell ed-Deir, and runs to Et Taiyibeh, thence follows the road to Samma and Mukhraba, and on down the shoulder of the Ard el-Musheirfi to M'aâd in the west. The water-basin thus comprised occupies about two-thirds of the area of the present Map. The shape of this region is triangular; broad in the east and narrowing towards the west.

A second line of watershed, that closing off the Wâd et-Taiyibeh and the Wâd el-Hummâm (and Wâd et-Tibn), passes along the shoulder from near Kefr Kifa to Samû'a and along to Es Sibia, running west of Mukhraba, Zebda, and Mendah, where many short ravines run down into the Ghôr, taking their rise near the south-western watershed of Wâd el-'Arab.

The various wâdies on the Map will be described below in their alphabetical order, under each separate Nâhiyet or district.

The soil is, as already stated, generally poor in

Northern 'Ajlûn. Of a superior quality is that of the plain lying west of Umm Keis, which is partly covered with lava remains, as likewise the shoulder running from here eastwards to Ibdar. On the slopes of the Wâd el-'Arab good pasturage is found during the springtide, as well as along the shaded and partly-watered beds of the branch Wâdies, where sufficient food for the cattle and flocks is also met with during the whole of summer. In the eastern region lying between the Wâd el-Ghafir and the before-mentioned shoulder near Ibdar, and bounded by the lands of the Wâd el-'Arab, Beit Râs, El-Bâriha, and Zaher en-Nasâra,—a very stony, unfertile district is found, which in its general aspect resembles the stony region of Jaulân. This track, though now uninhabited, proved on examination to have been thickly settled in ancient times. Eastwards from Kefr Jâiz, Beit Râs, and Irbid, the soil improves, and the wide plain of El-Buk'â, as well as the country round Maru, bears a close resemblance to the excellent soil of the Haurân Province, which begins a few miles east of the limits of the present Map on the further side of the Wâd esh-Shelâleh.

The inhabited villages of Northern 'Ajlûn do not lie very close to one another, and considerable tracts of uncultivated land are met with. A number of the small towns, however, have lands in the

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Jordan Valley, where the soil, temperature, and water supply are all that can be desired.

If, however, the general physical characteristics of Northern 'Ajlûn are in many respects inferior to those of the Haurân plateau, the region enjoys an advantage which Haurân totally lacks, namely, in the abundant growth of its oak forests. From Umm Keis eastwards towards Haurân, from the head waters of the Wâd el-'Arab and along the Wâd el-Ghafr southwards to Sôm, Bersînia, and Tibneh (and still further south beyond the limits of the present Map), and westwards, to the slopes of the Ghôr, the entire region is thickly covered with forests of the stone-oak, called *Mallûl*, *Sindiân*, and *Ballût*, in Arabic. These trees, although of the same species, are in their growth far superior to the oaks of Western Palestine or even of Northern Jaulân. The small number of the inhabitants of the country, and the scantiness of the flocks and herds, have up to the present preserved uninjured this fine growth of forest, which is hardly to be matched in any other part of Palestine; and it is to be hoped that civilisation, which is now making steady progress in 'Ajlûn, will not cause the destruction of these ancient trees.

Along the eastern slopes of the Wâd el-'Arab, especially below Zahan el-'Akabi, also along the Wâd el-'Amûd and the Khallet Abu Lôz, wild

almond trees are abundantly found. According to the local tradition, they were originally planted in the "Krûm" or gardens. In the river beds and on the slopes of most of the wâdies, besides various kinds of oaks, we find the mock orange (*Styrax officinalis*), called *Abhar* and *Libna* (لبنة) in 'Ajlun; oleander and cane-brakes occur, especially near the streams of the wâdy el-'Arab; *Kharrub* (St. John's Bread), and *Butm* (terebinths) cover the northern shoulders of the Wâdy el-'Arab; while *Hummud* (sorrel), the Dôm-tree of the Ghôr, a kind of thorn, here called *Rubbeida*, and great quantities of *Kubbâr* (Caper-shrubs), and olive trees are found near the villages and ruins. The olive trees are generally very old, and are occasionally called *Rumelli*—meaning that they are "of the Romans" or Greeks, who may possibly have originally planted them; for the present generation of Arabs certainly does not occupy itself with the cultivation of these trees. The numerous oil-presses found scattered about the forest lands and near the villages prove that the olive culture was once in a very flourishing state throughout the district. On and near the northern slopes of the Wâd et-Tibn (Wâd el-Hummâm), from Samû'a southwards, we find many distinct traces of vine fences, small watch-towers, and numerous local names, which tend to show