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978-1-108-05203-0 - Unexplored Syria: Visits to the Libanus, the Tulúl el Safá, the  
Anti-Libanus, the Northern Libanus, and the 'Aláh: Volume 2

Richard Francis Burton and Charles Frederick Tyrwhitt Drake

Excerpt

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## CHAPTER I.

A RECONNAISSANCE OF THE ANTI-LIBANUS—FROM  
B'LUDAN VILLAGE TO THE APEX OF THE 'EASTERN  
MOUNTAIN'—AND RETURN MARCH THROUGH THE  
ANTI-LIBANUS TO B'LUDAN.

VOL. II.

B

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[More information](#)PART I.<sup>1</sup>FROM B'LUDAN VILLAGE TO THE APEX OF THE  
'EASTERN MOUNTAIN.'

MANY readers, even professional geographers, will think that we are to pass over trodden ground, and that in describing the Anti-Libanus we can do nothing but fill up with details the broad outlines traced by predecessors. The contrary is positively the case. I expected great things from 'L'Anti-Liban,' par Gérard de Rialle (*Bulletin de la Société de Géographie*, tome xvi. 1868), and found that it had covered only the well-known lower altitudes. He passes by Zebadání, over the 'Pont Romain,' of which mention has been made, to Ba'albak; he then 'does' the Cœlesyrian Valley from Anjar to Homs, and returns to Damascus by the eastern road, *viâ* Hasyah, Kárá,

<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to understand why Murray's Handbook (*passim*) insists upon retaining the bastard Latin and Greek term 'Anti-Lebanon.' Libanus is found in Psalm xxix. 5. Anti-Libanus we may derive from the Greek with Eusebius (*Onom.* sub voce Anti-Libanus), and it has, moreover, the merit of being legitimate.

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and Yabrúd. Surprising as it may appear, it is still true, that the best and most modern maps do not name a single valley north-east of Zebadání, nor a single summit, except the 'Jebel el Halímah, an utter misnomer. They show merely the long conventional caterpillar, flanked by the usual acidulated drops and seamed with the normal cobweb of drainage: when they have disposed all this parallel with the Libanus, they have apparently done their duty. Thus they neglect to show, amongst other things, the important change in the chain, whose northern half becomes exceptionally arid and barren, whilst the southern is remarkably fertile: this is also true of the Libanus, but to a lesser extent. The traveller in Syria and Palestine is also kept ignorant of the fact, that the general aspect of the range is far superior to that of the maritime sierra; that the colouring of the rocks is richer, the forms are more picturesque—often indeed 'weird, savage, grand, almost magnificent, like parts of Moab;' that the contrasts of shape and hue are sharper; and that the growth in places assumes the semblance of a thinned forest. Of the Anti-Libanus we may say, of the Libanus we may not, that 'ravines of singular wildness and grandeur furrow the whole mountain-

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side, looking in many places like huge rents;’ whilst the views from the summit are far superior in extent of range and in variety of feature. Moreover, the chain, which is thus in many points richer and more remarkable than its western sister, has the attractions of novelty: it may fairly be called a section of new ground in an old land.

During my twenty-three months of service—perhaps it might be called servitude—at Damascus I had twice inspected the most interesting features of this *Jebel el Sharkí* (the Eastern Mountain), the modern equivalent for the ancient Hebrew ‘Lebanon towards the sunrising.’ In August 1870 I had ascended successively the *Haláim* (or Paps) of *Kará*, *Kurrays*, *Zammarání*, and *El Kabú*, taking angles, laying down their altitudes, and building *Kakurs* (or old men), to serve for a theodolite survey. Poor *Jiryus Kátibah*, father of the young schoolmasters who have been stationed by the Irish-American Presbyterian Mission at *Yabrúd* and *Nabk*, together with his ‘*Asús*,’ will not readily forget one day’s work. In November 1870 we had pushed up the *Nabi Bárúh* block, but the snow had begun to fall before the work was finished: it was in *Ramazan*, and the little party of fasting Moslems, *Shaykh Sálíh*,

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## PREVIOUS VISITS.

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and others who accompanied us from 'Assál el Ward, will long remember that walk and ride. Finally, on July 31, 1871, taking advantage of a visit from Mr. C. F. Tyrwhitt Drake, I resolved to connect the two excursions by a march along the backbone from Jebel el Shakíf to the northern end. My fellow-traveller had, as usual, sole charge of the mapping and of the route-sketching, whilst the humbler task of keeping the journal fell to my lot.

The Anti-Libanus proper begins in north latitude  $33^{\circ} 30'$ , at the north-western flank of the Hermon, which I am disposed to place in a separate orine system. The modern French road, as it traverses the gorge Wady el Harír, the level upland Sahlat Judaydah, the ravine Wady el Karn, the *arête* 'Akabat el Týn—the basaltic link between the two chains—the descent Daurat el Billán (Camel-thorn Zigzag), and finally the unpopulated Saharat el Dí-más—Wild of (Saint?) Dimas—before plunging into the Barada Valley, accurately defines the southern limit. About north latitude  $34^{\circ} 28'$  it falls into the Hasyah-Hums plain, whose altitude is in round numbers 1600 feet; and the total length is thus fifty-eight geographical miles, and the lay is north-easterly ( $38^{\circ}$  Mag.). The breadth varies: the

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maximum—from the eastern mouth of Wady Zammarání to the Fíkah settlement—may be assumed at fourteen direct geographical miles, and the minimum—from Ba'albak to the 'Assál el Ward village, without including the rolling eastern outliers—would be eleven miles and a half. The northernmost section is bounded eastward by the upland plains of Kára and 'Assál el Ward, and westward by the lowlands of Ba'albak, the northern prolongation of the Buká'a or Cœlesyria. Southward the mountain is flanked by extensive buttresses, and even by lateral chains. For instance, about Zebadání,<sup>2</sup> the Buká'a is broken on the east by a line of detached upheavals, called after the settlements Kafr Zabad, Nabi Zaúr, and so forth; whilst still farther east is a rugged mass of highland, with crest scarped towards the rising sun, and known as the Jurd or upland of Zebadání, of Ayn Haur, of Sargháya, and of the other villages occupying its flanks. This great outlier is bounded on the north-east by the Wady Yahfúfah, and south by the Wady el Harír, through

<sup>2</sup> Burckhardt writes, after the Syrian mispronunciation, Zebdání for Zebadání, and Ainette for Aynata; but in the same page we find such barbarisms as Moya (water), and Argile (for Nargilah) a water-pipe, and elsewhere Djebel es Sheykh for Esh Shaykh. M. Gérard de Rialle prefers Zebdany and Bludân.

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## PREPARATIONS.

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which runs the French road between the capital of Syria and Bayrut its port.

Our preparations were easily made. We carried with us the few necessaries for a bivouac, not forgetting the indispensable water-skins, and two mules were lightly loaded with all our belongings. They were driven by old Ahmad Khálid, who grumbled that he was being taken away from his plums—locally called Khokh—as they were full ripe for market, and by the youth Hasan Khazzá Abú Zirs, who insisted upon bestriding a diminutive donkey up and down the stiffest of slopes. The extra hand was Mohammed of B'lúdán, whose profession was partly that of a Shikari, a hard-working laddie, who knows every hole and corner in his own beat. I can safely recommend him to all who would follow in our steps. The *point de départ* was B'lúdán, a little Christian village, Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic, which clings to the eastern flank of the Zebadání Valley, bearing 285° from that important Moslem town. The valley is well known to travellers, because it leads from Damascus to Ba'albak: in it we found the official sources of the Barada,<sup>3</sup> or

<sup>3</sup> This word is variously written by Arab geographers, nor can any *savant* in Damascus explain the meaning. Yákút (*Báb el Bā*) gives

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River of Damascus, and the pool from whose head it pumps lies at an angle of 239° Mag. from Mr. Consul-general Wood's summer quarters. The geographical or true source must be sought some five miles to the north-east; it is called Ayn Haur (Poplar Fountain), from the little valley of the same name, and it is fed in winter by the Sayl or torrent of Jebel el Shakíf. The water flows down a broken but clearly-defined valley, divided into sections, every one, as usual amongst these ungeneralising races, with its distinctive term; *e. g.* Wady el Kabír, Wady Ayn Haur,<sup>4</sup> and Wady Dillah. In summer, however, its precious supply is drawn off for the fields; hence it has not the honour of being popularly known as the Barada-head. The mythological source is the Júrah or swallow-hole in the western block which separates the valley of Zebadání from the Cœlesyrian Vale: this sink was, until late years, used as a Tarpeian rock, the offenders being of the sex formerly sacked at Damascus and Stambul.

Barada and Baradiyyá; Firozabadi, Baradat or Barada (بردي), making it spring in the Zebadání plain. There is no such word in classical Arabic as Baradah, which English writers have attempted to connect with hail, sleet, tempest. The vulgar, however, sometimes use Baradah in the sense of Mabrad, a file.

<sup>4</sup> In classical Arabic the white poplar is Hawar, plural Húrán; but Syrians always corrupt it to Haur.

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B'lúdán lies about 1000 feet above the Marjat Khan el Funduk, in the vale of the Wady Zebadání. Its site is a bulging shunt of fertile red humus, secondary limestone, iron-clay, red-black sandstone-grit, with here and there a bit of basalt. The general slope is  $9^\circ$ , and the rhumb  $285^\circ$  (Mag.). Although neither striations nor burnish are now retained by the easily-degraded rock, it has all the appearance of an old moraine, deposited by glaciers that once debouched from the uplands upon the Zebadání Valley, and which hollowed a passage for the Barada through the heart of the Anti-Libanus. Similar features are found in the Cedar Valley; in the red ground north and south of the Zahlah gap, which blushes so beautifully to the evening sun; and, without mentioning others, in the heaps at the gorge-mouths to the east and the north-east of Islandarún (Alexandretta). This moraine is bounded north by the depression called *Arz el Zahlát*, and south by the Wady Már Iliyás, a ruined temple converted into a Byzantine church and monastery, to which the modern hamlet faces.

The upper section of the B'lúdán Valley is a complicated bit of ground bearing  $41^\circ$  from below, and wheeling suddenly to  $60^\circ$ . It is walled on

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the east by a continuous line of heights, which here form the crest of the Anti-Libanus, and which appear from afar like a bending spine. As usual, every section has its own name. The mountain immediately behind B'lúdán is known as Jebel Rahwah; then come Jebel Rizmah; Jebel Ayn el Ghanim; Jebel Talláját bú Halláwí, Jebel el Ahhyár (which the people compare with Hermon), and the somewhat lower bluff (the aneroid showing a difference of 0·14) known as the Shayyár Ayn el Nusúr. Murray's Handbook, repeated by M. Gérard de Rialle and by Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible* (Lebanon), makes this B'lúdán Block a 'few miles north of the site of Abila,' the 'highest summit of Anti-Lebanon,' and assigns to it an inadequate altitude of 6800 instead of 7730 feet. It is bounded south by the gorge of the Barada; while northwards the rough and rugged apex of bare castellated and creviced lime-rock, showing on almost the highest part three Jurahs or sinks, is prolonged by a lower ridge to the cliff-spine of the farther Anti-Libanus. The B'lúdán Valley on the west, and to the east the Wady and the Sahlat of Bísán, and the Hakl (حقل)<sup>5</sup> or Wady el Anjásah (Pear-tree

<sup>5</sup> Literally rich arable land, here generally applied to narrow culti-