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the hills to which the name *Katavôthra* had been given, but as these were not sufficient a number of *emissarii*, or tunnels, were made to carry off the water, one of which is nearly 4 miles long, and it has about 20 vertical shafts, which are now choked up, but they are supposed to be about 100 or 150 feet deep. Crates attempted to clear out these conduits in the time of Alexander the Great, so that they must be of considerable antiquity. Perhaps other explorers may be able to supply further details, but the data seems already sufficient to establish the point, that the *Karaize* as a means of water supply has existed from a remote period over the wide space from Afghanistan to the Mediterranean.

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## PITS IN THE SHITTIM PLAIN.

By REV. JAMES NEIL, M.A.

FOR Dr. Selah Merrill's information, let me say that the journey on which I discovered these pits was arranged by a representative of the German Consulate at Jerusalem and the German Chaplain, Pastor Weser, to investigate the claims of the Shapira pottery, and to carry on excavations for this purpose on the highlands of Moab. Pastor Weser begged me, as the English Chaplain at Jerusalem, to accompany the expedition to see fair play, because the English savans from the first regarded the Shapira pottery as spurious. I had, indeed—very fortunately, as I now know—to “go far out” of my “way.” The ferry in the neighbourhood of Jericho was broken, and we were compelled to ride some 18 miles up the west of the Jordan Valley to the ferry opposite *Tell Damieh*, and the same distance down the east of the Valley to Ali Diab's camp, then in the Plain of Shittim, near *Tell Keferein*. Later on we had to return the same way, so that I rode twice past these lines of pits. On my return I mentioned my discovery to Major Conder and Mr. Drake, and they told me that they had just found similar pits in the neighbourhood of *Ain Fusail*, but it now appears that they were rock-cut cisterns, or *beers*.

I did not take special and accurate measurements of the pits, nor have I said that I did. In my descriptions I have very naturally adopted those published by the “American Palestine Exploration Society's Fourth Statement,” January, 1877. Let me again refer the readers of the “Quarterly” to my careful treatment of the whole subject in an article on “The Site of the Cities of the Plain and the ‘Pits’ of the Vale of Siddim,” in the “Theological Monthly,” May, 1890 (Messrs. J. Nisbet and Co.), in which I have given Dr. Selah Merrill credit for his very interesting and valuable identification of the probable sites of the Cities of the Plain, now so remarkably confirmed by my discovery of the

"water-pits of earth," **בְּאֵרוֹת הָאֲדָמָה**, of which the valley to the north of these five cities was full (Genesis xiv, 10).

Dr. Selah Merrill says in his original report, "What those pits (the slime pits of Genesis xiv, 10) were I do not know, nor do I know the object of the pits which at present exist." In the last "Quarterly" he says, "my impression was these pits were used for military purposes." Now these two statements are, no doubt, to be reconciled by the account of the legend which the Bedaween told him, and which Sheikh Goblan in part told me, as to the adventures of the fabulous Sheikh *Zeer*, for at its close he tells us, "this legend seems to indicate clearly that the pits were for military purposes." But I should like to remind Dr. Selah Merrill of what he tells us about this familiar story of their folk lore: "After a while he (Sheikh *Zeer*) tried to get his dominions back, and made war upon his own people for that purpose. They dug these pits *expecting that he would fall into them and be killed. He fell in but his nephew rescued him,*" &c

Now what meaning would this have, or what shadow of foundation in fact, if the pits, as the archeologist of the American Palestine Exploration Society would lead us to suppose, were but some 3 to 6 feet only in depth? But all will see, if they were formerly *Karaize* pits, or deep wells, how forcible and natural is the allusion to the falling in with risk of being killed, and to the need of being rescued from without.

The complete and conclusive answer to Dr. Selah Merrill's supposed difficulties as to whence came the materials by which the pits were filled up, and as to how the rims of the basin-like mounds around them could still remain to the height of a few feet, lies in the fact that the appearances now presented by these three lines of pits are precisely the same as those presented by the ruins of the *Karaize* system in the desert beyond Damascus, on the way to Palmyra—so much so that I instantly recognised them—and that they are like nothing else!

Can Dr. Selah Merrill be serious when he says, as a reason why these pits were not wanted for irrigation purposes, "Canals to-day carry water south of the stream (*Wady Nimrin*), and were water ever wanted north of it why would it not be carried thither in the same way?" Simply because the Jordan valley falls to the south and rises towards the north! He says, hypothetically and doubtfully, "were water ever wanted north of it." Why the want of water in that waste wilderness is woeful. It is for some 10 miles one of the most arid spots in Palestine, and that is saying a good deal. It is, moreover, one of the hottest and most rainless regions. I shall never forget how I suffered from thirst on the burning day when I traversed it first *en route* from *Tell Damieh* to *Nimrin*—a thirst and incipient fever which the Arabs of our escort sought vainly to assuage by giving us to chew the stalk and leaves of a succulent plant which they scoured the country far and wide to secure.

Excavations should certainly be made at this spot when the first opportunity offers, for if the channel at the bottom proves to be cemented, which, however, is very doubtful (see my discussion of this in my article in the May, 1890, "Theological Monthly"), the matter will be at once set at rest. But in any case we may hope to find evidence of the filling up of the *Karaize* pits, which I have no doubt whatever existed here in ancient times, not only in the three rows, of which ruins now remain, but also in many more crossing one below the other, as we know they do at the present day on the plains of Damascus. If I am right, where the lines of pits end on the east side near the hills, or where if extended a little further they would end, by digging we should come to water, and this again would be a certain proof.

I say *solvitur explorando*; and now let our Fund get to work at the first opportunity. We could engage in few more inexpensive, interesting, and important excavations. Think of finding pits *in situ* mentioned as existing 4,000 years ago!

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## COMPARISON OF THE HIGHEST AND LOWEST TEMPERATURES OF THE AIR, AND RANGE OF TEMPERATURE IN PALESTINE AND IN ENGLAND IN THE TEN YEARS ENDING 1889.

By JAMES GLAISHER, F.R.S.

THE observations at Sarona were taken by Herr J. Dreher, the instruments were made by Negretti and Zambra, and examined by myself.

The observations at Blackheath were taken during the same ten years, by instruments of a similar construction to those at Sarona, by myself.