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The Oasis of Siwa

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## THE OASIS OF SIWA<sup>1</sup>

### PART I.

#### THE ROUTE FROM MERSA MATRO TO SIWA.<sup>2</sup>

THE journey to Siwa from Mersa Matro takes five or six days by trotting camel and seven or eight by the ordinary baggage camel.

The most frequented road is *via* Bir Kanais and thence by the Masrab Establ to Siwa; the distance by this route is about 190 miles.

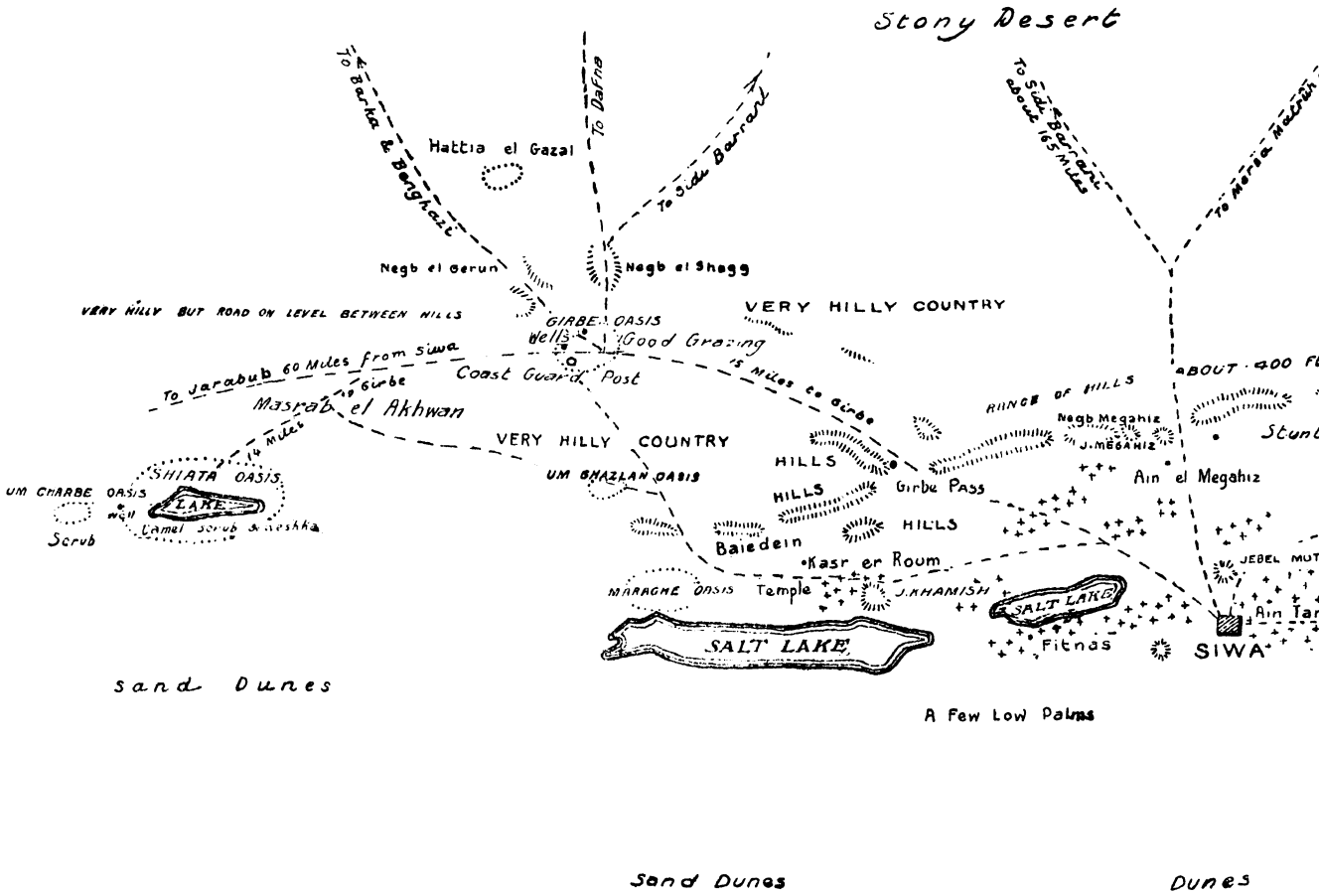
For the greater part of the year there is plenty of grazing for camels as far as Bir Kanais, which is 16 marching hours (40 miles) south from Matro, and grazing invariably proves irresistible to the Arabs, especially, as is generally the case, when they start out with a minimum of forage for the journey. Hence this first stage is nearly always taken in a very leisurely manner and occupies two days or more. After Bir Kanais is passed, however, the desert presents no further attractions and the journey is completed in five or six days more without any undue delay on the road.

After leaving Mersa Matro and crossing the low rocky hills to the south, a large partly cultivated plain about four miles wide is traversed. From this an ascent is made to the desert

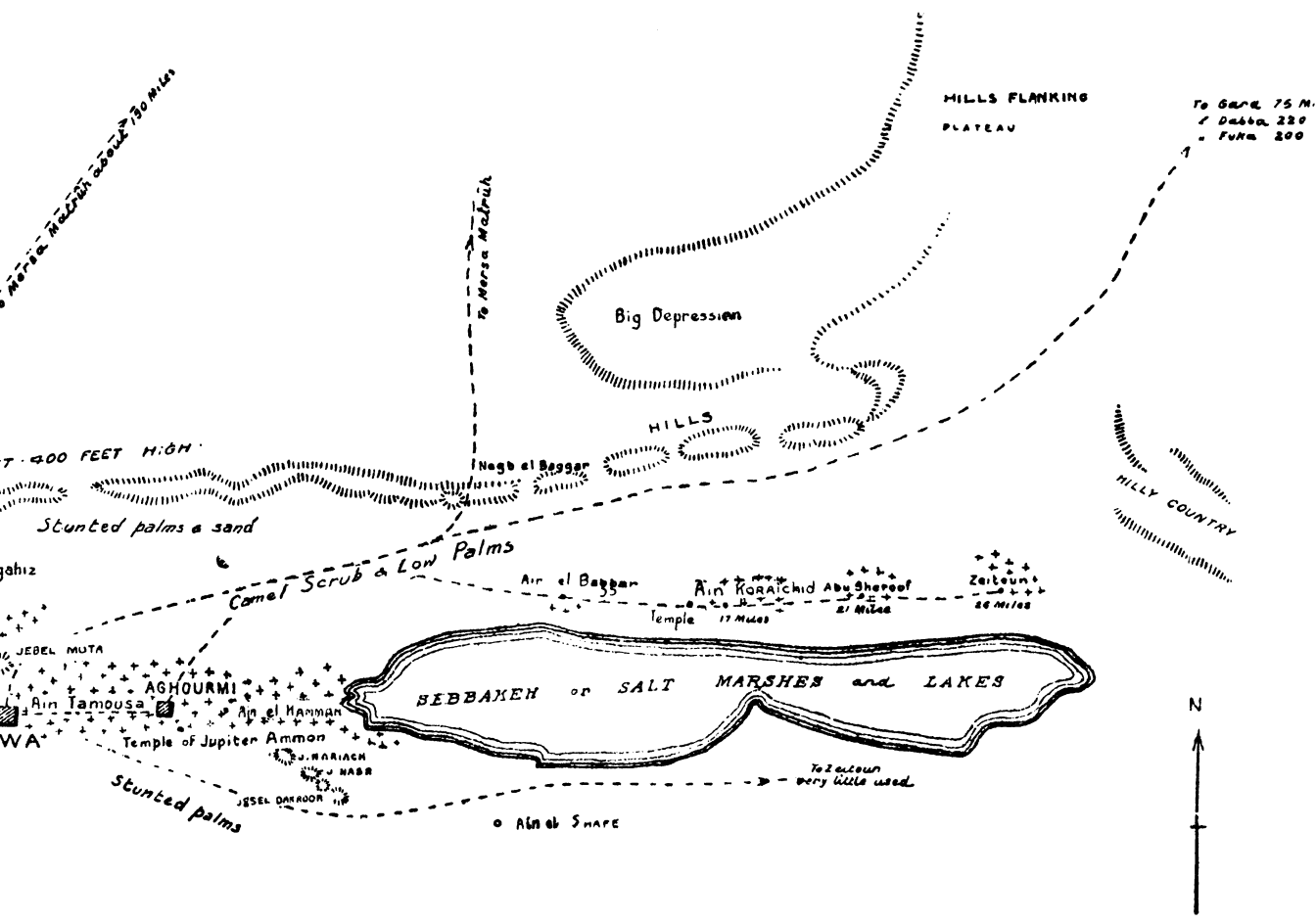
<sup>1</sup> This Report has been compiled by Captain C. V. B. Stanley, R.A.M.C. Considerations of space have necessitated the omission of certain portions of this interesting Report, and a consequent slight alteration in the arrangement of the order of subjects treated.—ED.

A vocabulary of Siwan and notes on Siwan grammar have been prepared by the author, and it is hoped that it may be possible to publish them in the next number of the *Journal*.—ED.

<sup>2</sup> Further details as to principal routes and distances will be found on p. 323.



SIWA



SKETCH-MAP OF  
SIWA OASIS

Scale very approximately 1 : 250,000.

Cultivation, chiefly palms .....

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proper through Wady el Raml or Wady el Huruba. Wady el Raml leads up out of the western end of this plain. Wady el Huruba is more direct and southerly but more difficult for baggage camels.

Between Matro and Kanais Roman wells and cisterns dating from about the second century will be found at frequent intervals.

These generally fill up during the winter rains and supply the Arab with water during the summer months; their encampments will generally be found at some distance from the wells, their flocks being driven in daily to water. The mounds formed by the excavation of these cisterns form prominent objects in the flat landscape, and they can be seen for miles.

There was plentiful water in Bir Gadallah, Wady el Raml, early in November, but it is too near Matro to be of much use to the traveller. Bir Jaffray, two hours south, was dry. Between Wady Huruba and Kanais are Bir Jibb, Bir Hafeed, and several others, all empty in January. Heavy rains were then falling.

*Bir Kanais.*—There are two wells here about one hundred yards apart, each at the foot of a mound on which are the ruins of what appear to be small Roman forts. The western well had plenty of excellent water in it in November. The neighbouring Arabs who migrate here in the summer greatly object to the watering of large numbers of camels here, as it exhausts their supply, but the payment of a small fee ( $\frac{1}{2}$  P.T. per camel) will generally smooth matters over, and the purchase of a sheep at an exorbitant price will promote the best of relations with them.

As far as Kanais there is no well defined track, but cairns of stones are frequent and sufficiently indicate the way. From Kanais southward the Masrab Establ is well marked all the way to Siwa, and in some places thirty parallel tracks will be found.

Several more wells are passed after leaving Kanais. Bir Hakfa, six hours south, has water after the rains; Bir Hilw, twelve hours south, was occupied by snakes and cockroaches; and Bir Establ, fifteen hours south, has water occasionally

after a heavy rainy season—there were a few human bones in it when I visited it.<sup>1</sup>

Bir Establ is the last well on the Siwa road and gives its name to the route—Masrab Establ. There is a diminishing amount of camel scrub for ten hours south of Bir Establ, and the road is flanked to the east by a low range of limestone rock. The going here is excellent over fine gravel.

There is little animal life seen in the desert. Gazelle are sometimes found, but always at some distance from the road, and they are extremely difficult to come up with. An occasional hare or a bustard is seen, and there are a good many sand grouse and jarboas. It is interesting to note the great number and variety of common sea shells encountered along the whole route. Mussels, clams, and oysters are particularly abundant, and fossil star-fish are frequently found.

All vegetation being now left behind, the road goes over a little limestone pass known to the Arabs by the expressive name Bab el Hazm el Baiood, and the remainder of the journey is over stony desert, flat, monotonous and dreary in the extreme. Occasionally one crosses a smooth, shiny, sun-baked water pan where previous rains have fallen, but for the most part the desert resembles a road that has been laid with broken stone and has not yet had a steam roller over it. The impression gathered is that of walking in the middle of a huge plate and never getting any nearer the edge. In November the days are very hot and the nights bitterly cold. In January it rained day and night, with a cold wind from the north and very little sunshine.

It is fifty hours' marching from Bab el Hazm el Baiood to Siwa—say  $3\frac{1}{2}$  days. About half-way are two large cairns of stone called Basoor.

Fifteen hours' march from Siwa a long low blue ridge is seen on the horizon, and after passing it the desert becomes more broken and undulating. A small conical hill—Gebel el Mehimcen—about 30 feet high, lies directly in the path. The Arabs believe that a sick man who can hop to the top of this hill on one foot cannot be suffering from Siwan fever—hence the name of the hill. It is difficult to imagine any sick man

<sup>1</sup> These distances, and many others mentioned in this Report, are calculated for a walking caravan which covers about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles an hour.

attempting it even for the comfort of a negative diagnosis.

Six miles south of this some flat-topped hills are seen: these are at the top of the pass Negub el Baggar.

The Desert level being about 400 feet above, and that of Siwa 70 feet below sea-level, a considerable drop has to be made before reaching the Oasis. There are two passes by which Siwa may be now approached, Negub el Baggar and Negub Megahiz, named after the springs at the foot of each respectively. From the top of Negub el Baggar a general view of the Oasis is obtained, the frequent silver sheets of water alternating with brown sebbakeh patches and immense green groves of palms. Out to the west and fifteen miles distant, the big table mountain of Khamisa rises sheer from the plain, and to the south is seen the black range of Dak-roor; and high golden sand dunes stretch as far as the eye can reach.

Siwa itself is now about ten miles distant to the southwest, and a gradual descent is made to the plain through the ragged weather-beaten hills. A vast lonely valley stretches away to the east. The road from the foot of the pass winds through low sand hills, stunted palms and halfa grass, towards the belt of date palms which holds in its midst two gloomy looking brown fortresses perched on two low hills. These are the old towns of Siwa and Aghourmi. Aghourmi is left to the south and Siwa is lost to view temporarily behind Gebel Muta—the Mountain of the Dead—with its thousands of rock-hewn tombs.

The road now becomes firmer and whiter—the traveller no longer walks on sand but on salt, which gives the ground a frosted appearance—the date gardens with their neat hedges of palm leaf are reached, the weird mountain of the dead is passed, a few hundred yards of straight road, and Siwa is at last reached.

#### THE OASIS—THE SPRINGS—CULTIVATION: DATES, OLIVES.

##### *The Oasis.*

The Oasis of Siwa is only a part of the great depression in which it lies; it may be taken to extend from Zeitoun in the

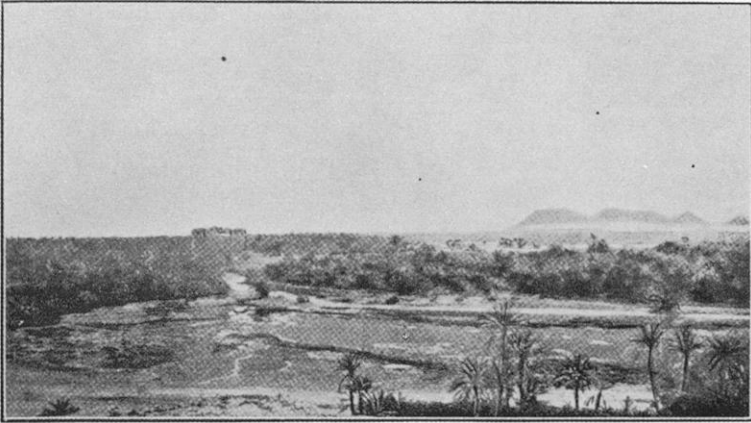
east to Baideen and Maraghe in the west—a distance of over 30 miles in length. West from Maraghe extends a regular chain of small oases along the same valley or its offshoots. Such are Girbe, Um Ghazlan, Shiata, Um Gharbe, and Gaijab along the Jarabub road or Masrab el Akhwan, but there is no cultivation in these hattias, or oases, although they have water and excellent grazing for camels and are much frequented by Arabs in consequence. The breadth of Siwa Oasis from the northern hills to the sand dunes on the south is from four to five miles. About a quarter of this area is under cultivation, the rest being sand, salt lakes and sebbakeh or salt lands. The cultivated land is generally at a higher level by two or three feet than the surrounding sebbakeh, and is always carefully fenced in by neat hedges made of palm branches. Excellent hard roads lead across the waste lands to the various islands of cultivation, but once off the road progress is almost impossible over the hard and sharp-edged ridges of salt and mud which are thrown up everywhere, and amongst which innumerable pools of salt water are found.

The principal salt lakes are those of Zeitoun, Koraichin, Khamisa and Maraghe. They receive their water from numerous springs in their midst as well as from the fresh water fountains after they have irrigated the fields.

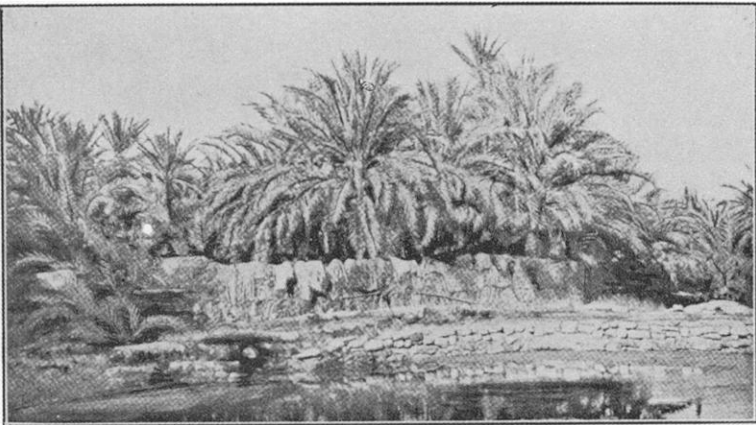
The whole oasis is fringed by a belt of sandy soil in which halfa grass, tarfa shrubs and stunted palms or weshka flourish. The ground over a great part of the sebbakeh is white from the outcrops of pure salt.

A year's supply of this salt is collected by the natives on the Eve of Courban Bairam and at no other time, and on this day hundreds of donkeys and labourers can be seen taking loads of it away from the Khamisa district, where the best salt is found.

The picturesque roads leading amongst the gardens are overhung with palms and flanked by narrow waterways which traverse the country in all directions, while at frequent intervals a fountain of sparkling water under the shade of the trees is a restful and pleasant thing to look upon.



OASIS.—GENERAL VIEW.—AGHOURMI AND DACROOR MOUNTAIN SEEN IN DISTANCE.



AIN EL HAMMAM.—A HOT SPRING WHERE LAUNDRY WORK IS DONE.

*To face p. 295*

## THE SPRINGS.

The most striking feature of Siwa is undoubtedly its springs. At one time it was said to possess 1,000, but there are now less than 200, and of these only about 80 are of use for drinking and irrigation purposes. They are generally from 30 to 80 feet in diameter and about 20 feet deep. The water in them is particularly clear and sparkling; continuous streams of bubbles are always ascending to the surface, in some cases with such rapidity and violence as to give the impression that the water is boiling. Some of the springs are hot, such as those of Ain el Hammam and Ain Tamousa, which are in constant use by the women for bathing and washing clothes. The water of the springs is saline in varying degrees—most of it is excellent to drink, especially that of Ain el Shafa, a spring about 4 miles south-east of Siwa in the desert. Some of the fountains are lined with stone masonry of the Roman period in perfect preservation. They have to be cleaned out once a year or oftener owing to the growth of weed round the sides and on the surface. Each spring irrigates one or more hattias or farms. Sometimes these are at a considerable distance, but as a rule the spring is found in the centre of a garden or at the junction of two or three of them. Irrigation is carried out as in Egypt by running the water through small channels into the various hods, the different groups of these being shut off from each other by a slab of stone. The hod is the only measure of area in Siwa—there are about 400 Siwan hods in the feddan.

Some of the fountains have big "Khazans" in connection with them, in which the water is stored when not required for irrigation. After traversing the farm the water is run off by channels or finds its own way to the nearest salt marsh. Hot springs and cold, salt and fresh, seem to occur haphazard, and there may be seen a fresh water spring right in the middle of a patch of salt land, and hot and cold springs within 50 yards of each other.

## CULTIVATION.

The richer Siwans have one or more "hattias" of their own, each with its spring and a couple of thousand date trees,

and perhaps a summer residence attached, but among the poorer people there may be half a dozen owners of one hattia, each cultivating his own plot, which is divided from the rest by a well-made palm hedge.

Where there are several proprietors or where a spring waters more than one farm, it is inevitable that disputes should arise over the division of the water.

These are all referred to the "Rakkab" of the spring according to the code of the Defter el Ain, in which are laid down precise rules for the guidance of cultivators. These Rakkabs—there are many—are paid by the community in kind, generally dates.

The most important products of the soil in Siwa are its dates and olives. They furnish its only exports and enable the inhabitants to trade with the Arabs, and to pay their taxes. Anything else grown is for local consumption. Other fruits found in abundance are excellent red grapes, figs, apricots, sweet lemons, bitter oranges, limes and pomegranates. Of herbs and vegetables we find bamia, bedingan, pumpkin, tomatoes, cress, onions, broad beans, garlic, mint, radishes and pepper. In every hattia will be found three or four varieties according to the individual taste of the owner.

Large quantities of berseem are grown, and it would seem to do very well in Siwa, as it flourishes in soil where other crops have a hard struggle for existence. A small amount of flax and vetches is also seen.

Wheat, dhurra, and barley are cultivated, but not to any great extent.

Garlic is held in great esteem as a preventive of sickness. It is only eaten for a period of 4 to 7 days in October, during which large quantities are consumed. The men and women separate during the garlic festival.

The ground is broken by means of a hoe called a "toarit" with a very short handle and a very broad blade. It is called rubb, tult, or tultein toarit, according as the blade is  $\frac{1}{2}$ ,  $\frac{1}{3}$  or  $\frac{2}{3}$  of a dira in length.

#### DATE PALMS.

There are many varieties of dates grown in Siwa, some of which are purely local species.

The chief are :—

Saidi.	Khaieeby.
Feraighi.	Widdy.
Ghazali.	Azawi.
Aghourmi Ghazali.	Tukk-tukkt.

Two-thirds of the total number are Saidi—the trees are low, but bear enormous crops when well manured and looked after.

The Zammar Grass, and Fasool (which is the dried camel scrub known as Argool) are made up into bundles and put round the roots of the trees every year. The dates are packed for export in locally made baskets each holding 25 saghs. The sagh is a measure of capacity and holds about 2 okes of dates. Two basketfuls make a camel load. Six or seven thousand loads of dates are taken away by the Arabs yearly to the coast between Beughazi and Alexandria chiefly.

Saidi dates are exported in a semi-dried condition.

The Feraighi and Ghazali trees amount to about 6,000. They bear small red or white dates which are dried before export. Very few of them are taken from Siwa. The Ghazali is, with the exception of the Tukk-tukkt variety, the best date grown in the Oasis. The Tukk-tukkt is a big yellow date which ripens very late.

The Widdy dates are from poorer class trees or those which have not been cultivated at all. On account of their cheapness they are largely used for feeding animals, and by the poorer Siwans and Arabs.

The average yield of date trees all round, according to a Siwan notable, is about 10 saghs each or 20 okes, but a good Feraighi tree will yield from 40 even up to 100 saghs.

In a good year (*i.e.*, plenty of buyers) the price will be a dollar for 10 saghs for Saidi or Feraighi, or for 16 to 30 saghs of Widdy dates. The rate of exchange this year is very low, the rate being a dollar for 15 saghs of the best dates, owing to the scarcity of buyers and money. The dates have to be sold in January in bulk, as the heaviest portion of their taxes fall due before the end of that month. They are paid :—

Six-eighths in January, the height of the date season.

One-eighth in October, the Feraighi season.

One-eighth in November, the olive season.

Export takes place chiefly from December to the end of February.

No census of Siwan palms has been made for over 40 years; the number was then returned as 89,000 and on this number taxes continue to be collected. The Siwans admit that they have probably increased by 25 per cent. in the meanwhile.

A considerable number of trees die off every year, and others are sacrificed to the making of Labgi, a fermented wine, from the juice of the stem of the palm, the procuring of which destroys the tree.

Besides this Labgi the Siwans use a mild drink which is got by making incisions under the fronds, while a more laborious process procures them Aragi. A jar is filled,  $\frac{2}{3}$  with water and  $\frac{1}{3}$  with dates, and left for from 10 to 15 days. The contents are then distilled and the distillate collected through an old gun barrel which is run into an earthen "boccal" through a water jacket. The "boccal" is a round shaped jar or ballast.

### OLIVES.

The largest olive groves are at Zeitoun belonging to Sheikh es Senoussi, and those in the Khamisa district. A full crop is only taken every second year. Very excellent oil is made locally in very primitive oil presses. About half the olive crop is consumed locally.

### THE TOWNS OF SIWA AND AGHOURMI.

There are only two towns in the Oasis, Siwa and Aghourmi, but there are several small workmen's hamlets among the more distant properties at Zeitoun, Koraichin, Fitnas, and Khamisa, while there is a small settlement of rock dwellers at Maraghe, seven miles west of Siwa, who have made comfortable houses of the capacious tombs which are found in the mountain there.



OLIVE OIL PRESS.

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## SIWA.

The original town is built on a hill and appears as a solid mass of brown masonry presenting a practically unbroken front except where the original gate existed. The houses are built tier on tier in about eight stages, and are lighted by groups of small windows arranged triangular fashion, two being below and one above.

The old entrance to the town is on the north front under the Gama Atika—it is a very narrow, steep flight of steps roughly cut in the rock on which the town stands. The ancient dungeon, a dark, pestilential hole in the rock, is immediately to the left of the entrance, and above the dungeon is the common treasure-house of former times. They are both now in disuse. The treasury had a small door with two heavy wooden locks, one for the east and one for the west. It could not then be opened unless both the representatives of east and west were present. Food and emergency supplies against a siege were kept there, and the poor were fed from it.

This old gate to the north was the only entrance for years, but as life and property became safer and fighting less frequent, other breaches were made, and there are now three other difficult entrances into the town. The old boundary between east and west is to be seen from the south, where a great portion of the fortress is in ruins.

There is a great tendency on the part of the present Siwans to leave the old nest, and build below in the plain. So they migrate, the easterns down to Manchia, the westerns to the slopes of Karret el Belad, and leave the old houses to fall into decay. It is noteworthy that even in leaving the town to build below, the people still maintain the old division of east and west. No westerner would think of living in Manchia, nor would an easterner overstep the boundary line in the other direction.

The houses are built of rock salt and mud brick for the most part; the walls are thick at the bottom, but perilously thin in the upper parts of the town. However, they are so bound together and dovetailed into each other with palm

trunks that they seem to resist all attacks of time and weather, provided that they receive a yearly daub with fresh mud. Fortunately rain is rare and never heavy in the Oasis, otherwise it is doubtful if they could withstand even a moderate storm.

None of the houses are whitewashed; a few of them have a band or two of white at the level of the windows.

The interior of the town is a veritable labyrinth of streets a yard wide or less, steep flights of rough steps, rocky slippery passages and tunnels leading up and down, here and there, in most bewildering fashion. To right and left of these passages are little doors four feet high made of thick palm logs with wooden ornamented locks, and occasionally a rough chain and staple.

The degree of light in these tunnels varies from deep gloom to absolute darkness. They are roofed over by stout palm trunks, and steps lead up to the living rooms, over the street, which is open only to the door and a small entrance hall. One or two open spaces are found round Bir Shali, the principal well of the town, and Bir Ahmed, and a fine view is got from the roof of Gama el Atika, the oldest mosque in Siwa.

There are six wells in the town now being described, and twelve others are scattered amongst the newer habitations, chiefly to the east.

The ruins of an old olive press are seen high up in the town near Bir Ahmed—it is said to have been out of use for two hundred years, but the ground and surrounding buildings are still saturated with, and smell strongly of, olive oil.

Immediately below the town are public squares to the north and east. The large square on the north contains the tomb of Sidi Sliman, the local saint, a general meeting place on all ceremonial occasions. Close by is the New Mosque which is being built by the Wakfs Administration. It promises to be a very handsome structure, but as yet is only about three feet above ground. There are at present about a dozen mosques in Siwa, including the Senoussi and Medani Zawias, but they are all of most primitive construction and faulty sanitation. The square to the east is where most of the Arab

trading is done and where is found the local "sûk." Rows of booths and shops extend under the shadow of the old walls, and trade is brisk when one or two big caravans come in. The merchants are mostly Arabs; there are a couple of Sudanese and one or two from Alexandria who come for the date season only.

There are a few butchers' shops where camel meat generally and mutton occasionally may be bought. Eggs and fowls are procurable, but not milk.

These open spaces separate the town from the date markets, which are four in number and enclosed by high walls. They are divided inside into squares, each belonging to some individual Siwan family, who alone have the right to expose dates for sale in it. The dates are arranged in heaps on the ground, and one may eat his fill in the market itself without payment, but may not carry any away. In a corner may be seen a crude process of making honey from the dates. A hole is dug in the ground and lined with earthenware. Across the opening palm fronds are placed and the dates are heaped on top and pressed down. The thick juice trickles through the leaves for from ten to fifteen days, then the honey is recovered, and the exhausted dates mixed with the general supply for sale to the Arabs. This honey is very good, and is in common use among the better class Siwans.

To the south of the town is the main cemetery, but there are several others, notably one to the east between Siwa and Aghourmi, and a disused one to the north-west. The graves are very shallow and the body is barely covered by the two halves of a palm trunk split down the middle.

About half a mile to the south of the cemetery are the ruins of the old Markaz; the present Markaz, an ugly building built on an old salt marsh, is immediately to the north of the town, and spoils the view of it from that side.

In the newer town on the plain the houses are built separately, and more or less in streets. Some of the richer people have houses built partly or entirely of stone from the hills. The windows are no longer grouped in threes, but are single; they have a wooden frame with four openings—each opening has a separate little wooden door.

In this eastern part is found Gama Manchia, a very old Mosque with a low square minaret.

The population of Siwa town is about 3,500.

#### AGHOURMI.

This town is about a mile and half east of Siwa; it stands on a high precipitous rock which overhangs on all sides. At least a dozen springs emerge from under the rock in various places. Some of these are hot, some cold, some fresh and some salt, and all are in a circumference of three-quarters of a mile at most.

The town is closely invested by palm groves, and stands out well above them, thus being a very conspicuous landmark. The streets are a little wider, and there is more elbow-room than is found in Siwa, but the building and arrangement of the town are the same. A single gate still serves for all the inhabitants: in former times this was held day and night by fourteen armed ghaffirs. There is an excellent well, Bir Aghourmi, inside the town, besides the springs before-mentioned. In the middle of the town are some ancient Egyptian ruins of stone, consisting of two typical temple doorways and portions of some walls, which extend right out to and overhang the edge of the rock on the north side. They are wedged in between and incorporated with the general mass of buildings. I had leisure to inspect these remains very carefully, but found absolutely no trace of any inscription or hieroglyphics such as I was told existed there. The people of Aghourmi say that this was not a temple, but the treasury of the adjacent oracle and temple of Jupiter Ammon. They call it "El Khazeena," and the hill on which their town is built "Karret el Khazeena." They believe underground passages exist between the Khazeena and the temple, between the Khazeena and Gebel Muta or Musaberin a mile west, and between the temple and Beit el Sultan, a tomb on Dakroor mountain, a mile to the south.

There are two date markets similar to those at Siwa. The cemetery is to the west, on the broad highway connecting the two towns.

The population of Aghourmi is about 750.

## NOTE ON FEVER AND OTHER DISEASES.

The chief prevailing disease in Siwa, and the one of which most is heard, is fever. It makes itself felt most severely at two periods of the year: (1) From the middle of May to the end of June during the apricot season, when it is known as "Mishmish Fever," and (2) from the beginning of the date season in August, it being then called "Date Fever."

As a matter of fact it occurs practically the whole year round, and is really malarial fever, generally of the Quotidian type.

Twelve blood slides from patients (Siwan, Egyptian and Arab) which I brought back from Siwa all exhibited the malarial parasite on microscopic examination.

Of 1,269 visits made by out-patients to the Government Dispensary in 1910, 450 were fever cases. Of these, 170 were from amongst the Police and Government employees in the district (about 30 in all). This does not indicate that it is more prevalent among Egyptians, but that they present themselves more frequently for medical treatment, as the Dispensary is in the same building in which they live. I think if the soldiers were induced to take some form of exercise, or had some active employment during their stay in Siwa, that they would be less likely to be down with fever so frequently.

The remaining 280 cases were mostly Bedouins, and I can only find that 47 Siwans attended for quinine during the year. They either neglect the fever altogether or have recourse to some of the many local remedies.<sup>1</sup>

Children are specially prone to the disease, and splenic enlargement is commonly found amongst them.

The death rate, however, does not seem to be unduly great, considering the prevalence of malaria, and averages about 8 per month in a population of 4,000.

The Siwans claim to be very long-lived, and certainly the number of deaths recorded at over 70 years of age is remarkable; but owing to the absence of birth records the lengthy list of centenarians must be regarded with some scepticism.

The deaths for the past two years have been:—

<sup>1</sup> These Siwan medicines are described by the author, but space does not admit of giving them in detail here.—ED.

	1909.	1910.
Under 10 years of age ... ..	48	16
10—40 „ „ ... ..	15	16
40—70 „ „ ... ..	11	25
70—100 „ „ ... ..	16	27
100 „ „ and over ... ..	6	18
Total ... ..	96	102

The very marked decrease in the deaths of children during 1910 is attributed by Dr. Farid Effendi Ramadan, late medical officer at Siwa, to the improvement and cleaning out of the very primitive drainage system in the town.

There was a general shortage of food and great scarcity of money last winter, and I attribute a perceptible increase in the death rate amongst adults in the months of December 1910 and January 1911 to the lack of sufficient nutritious food and the severe coldness of the weather.

The low level of Siwa, the great amount of marshy ground and semi-stagnant pools in the vicinity of the town, and the fact that the town has big gardens of palm trees and undergrowth of various kinds right up to the dwelling houses, combine to make it an ideal breeding place for mosquitoes, and it is difficult to see how they could be really efficiently dealt with.

Draining and filling in all the pools and breeding grounds would be a stupendous undertaking—I had almost said out of the question; and half measures are useless. Even if they were dealt with there would remain the watercourses and the gardens with their continual irrigation, and these would present, I think, insuperable difficulties unless the Government was prepared to spend a large amount of money. Again, we have the very primitive notions of sanitation of the Siwans themselves to contend with, and the peculiar and labyrinthine nature of the town itself as very serious obstacles to sanitary reform.

Of the infectious diseases:—

Measles has not been seen for 12 years.

Smallpox—no outbreak since 1904.

Diphtheria—2 cases treated in 1910.

Dengue—3 cases treated in 1910.

Tubercle—3 cases among Sudanese in 1910.

Ophthalmia is very common.

Venereal disease is common amongst the poor, but they do not come for treatment.

THE SIWANS : THEIR DOMESTIC LIFE AND CHARACTER.—  
ANIMALS.

*The Siwans and their Domestic Life.*

The Siwans are said to be of Berber origin, and their language bears this out. The people of Aghourmi are locally supposed to be descended from what they call "the Nazrani stock."

The population, according to the latest estimate, is under 4,000.

The men are above the average height and are not very prepossessing to look at. In a country where Sudanese are so numerous, being employed as domestic slaves, it is not surprising to find a great number of the population with a distinct Sudanese cast of countenance both in colour and contour, but the pure bred Siwan is much fairer.

There is none of the warm colouring of the Egyptians, their complexions being a pale ashy grey. They have generally short straight noses, thin lips, and weak chins in which the sub-labial depression is often absent. The hair is straight and dark in colour but not black.

The young girls have jet black hair, which is kept always dressed and glistening with olive oil. They wear large silver rings in the ears and round the neck. Some of the women are good-looking, but they are kept strictly secluded. Black eyes are the rule, but grey and blue may also be noticed. Their complexions are quite pale, and the inactive lives they lead result in their becoming very fat as they grow older. The women all wear the same uniform material in their dresses, a striped cotton cloth in two shades of blue.

This is imported from Kerdasa in Giza Province. A loose blue shirt is worn underneath, and this is cut with a square opening at the neck with a short straight band of yellow or

green silk embroidery (atook). Their libasses are also prettily embroidered with red and green silk thread. The women spend their spare time at this embroidery and in doing coloured straw basket work, at which they are very clever.

The men, except a few of the richer sheikhs who wear Arab dress, wear a white or blue cotton shirt, white or blue drawers, and a "jibba" of coarse undyed material, loose and sleeveless, with coloured threads worked in patterns on the front and back.

The population of Siwa is divided into the two religious sects of Senoussia and Madania in the proportion of three to two. The west is all Senoussi, the east partly Senoussi and partly Madani. But the real division of the little community is the traditional one of east and west, who have been at loggerheads from time immemorial, and the eastern, be he Senoussi or Madani, will always be up in arms against the west and *vice versa*. The Aghourmi people, however, have nearly always kept to themselves, and belong to neither east nor west. They have played the part of spectators in these little civil wars. It is pleasing to add that no actual hostilities have taken place now for some years, the last big fight being in April 1897, when Hassouna Mansour, the most turbulent of Siwans, and six other sheikhs were killed with one hundred of their men, eighty others being wounded. But the two factions still keep very much apart.

An individual who exercised a great influence for peace was Mahomed Mansour (brother of Hassouna) who was Sheikh of the Sarahna (west) and member of the Assembly for fifty years. This fine old fellow always exerted himself on the side of the Government in their efforts to bring about better relations between the two factions. He died during my visit to Siwa, on December 31st, 1910. The Sheikh of the Sarahna has been chosen from the Mansour family for 300 years, and the new Sheikh is Omran, son of old Mahomed, and little more than a boy, who was elected unanimously in January last.

There is a mutual distrust noticeable between the Siwans and the Arabs; the latter despise the Siwans and fear the

magic powers which they are supposed to possess, and the Siwans, doubtless mindful of previous bad treatment at their hands, treat the Arabs with the reserve that is accorded to all strangers in the country. The Arabs very seldom enter the town, but lodge just below it. They are purely nomads and travellers, and do not settle in the Oasis.

Cordial relations, however, exist with Jarabub, the Senoussi headquarters, and the elders there are always called upon when any particularly knotty point has to be settled in Siwan affairs. Their influence is paramount not only in Siwa, but over all the western desert, and from what one can see this influence is exerted entirely for good.

The morals of the Siwans have always been a byword and a reproach amongst those who come in contact with them, and there is no doubt that they are sadly lacking in this respect. The elders at Jarabub have repeatedly urged them to mend their ways, and it is said that some improvement has taken place of late years, but neither men nor women have any sense of moral obligations as we understand them. . . .

Very few of them can read or write, and it is to their terrible isolation and lack of education that their moral deficiencies must be attributed. The establishment of a good school at Siwa would go far towards giving them a more healthy environment, and lifting them out of the slough of ignorance and superstition in which they have wallowed for centuries.

Men generally marry after the age of twenty, but girls may have been married several times before eleven years of age. Until this age they are merely used as house servants. Divorce is exceedingly easy and extremely common. The usual dowry is about six dollars and is paid by the bridegroom. It would seem that in Siwa the line between marriage and prostitution is very ill defined.

They are very fond of music and dancing, and some of the songs they sing in the fields are quite tuneful, and may be heard for great distances in the still atmosphere.

They somewhat resemble the chants in church music. Their musical instruments are drums, a stringed instrument, the zamorra, and castanets. They also have a flute made out of old gun barrels, which plays very sweet music. A

peculiarity of Siwan music is that they can translate speech into music, the various notes and cadences having definite meanings, so that on special occasions the music is always extempore and is understood by the audience just as a speech would be.

Before leaving Siwa, I was entertained by a local notable who engaged a flute player to compose a farewell to me. This man asked me what route I was about to take, whether I would visit Gara, and whether I would finally bring up at Mersa Matro or Dabba. Having found out what he wanted, he started a long musical discourse, describing how I came to Siwa, what I did while there, my visit to the Sheikh, his patron, and my departure *via* Gara and Kattara for Dabba. He finally ended up with a prayer to Rabbona for my safe arrival at the end of the journey. The Sheikh translated the music to me in Arabic as it was being played.

The feasts of Courban Bairam and of Sidi Sliman, the local saint, are made the occasions of great rejoicings and good living, visits and presents being freely exchanged and everyone appearing in their gayest attire. On the eve of Bairam there is a general cleaning up of the town, and clothes, mats, carpets and blankets are hung over the battlements for this purpose, giving it the appearance of being decorated for the occasion.

The prettiest ceremony, however, is during the feast of Yom Ashura (January 11th, this year). For several days then the roofs of the houses are decorated with huge palm fronds eighteen to twenty feet in length, to which are attached torches soaked in oil. After sunset these are all lit up and for several hours the old town and the new are a blaze of illumination. The children of both sexes sing from the roofs late into the night the monotonous but sweet refrain: "Eedi, Eedi, ya hamudi, Fok Djiridi." It is customary for friends to exchange at this season what are almost exactly like our Christmas trees. They differ for boys and girls. The girls' tree, called the Busbasa (window), is a square framework of palm branch erected on a stout pole in a horizontal position. To the corners and along the four sides are fixed torches, and the framework is hung with presents of fruit, mint, sweets or pigeons. The boys' tree, the Zarabya,

is decorated in the same way, but the framework is in the shape of a cross.

Both have patterns worked on them by stripping the bark and staining the exposed surface with Inab el Dyb or pomegranate juice.

The houses of the Siwans are very dark, except the reception room, which generally has its group of windows open. Better class houses are kept scrupulously clean. The furniture is very simple—a carpet to sit on, a couple of plaited mats, a few pegs in the wall, two painted wooden chests, a straw basket and platter, a pole slung across one corner on which are hung some Arab harams and hemels, and a small tin case containing the ingredients for making tea: such is the furnishing of an ordinary room.

Tea is a great institution and is drunk at all hours of the day. The tea box contains three compartments, one for tea, one for sugar with a hammer to break it up, and a third for mint. The third cup of tea—three are always partaken of—is made with mint added to it.

The tea party squats round a very low round table on which is a copper tray and small glass tumblers holding about as much as a sherry glass. The "Sultan" is then chosen to make the tea, and the chosen one is considered to be highly honoured. He puts several spoonfuls of green tea in a peculiar shaped pewter teapot which comes from Bengerazi, and a Sudanese attendant brings in boiling water in an ordinary black kettle.

The teapot is filled and almost at once poured off, the contents being discarded, as the preliminary brew is considered injurious in the best circles. The pot is filled again and a large quantity of sugar added; it is then placed on a small earthen charcoal brazier and stirred. The Sultan tastes the brew from time to time, or pours out a little for one of the guests to sample. If more sugar is required it is added, and finally, with great ceremony, each guest receives his glass of very bitter tea. It is drunk noisily and the process repeated. For the third brew a handful of mint either fresh or powdered is added. This tea becomes a very pleasant beverage after a few experiences, but at first its bitter sweet taste is something of a shock.

*Animals.*

No account of the Siwans would be complete without reference to the donkeys, which are very numerous. They are sleek, well cared for little animals, and their diet of dates and berseem seems to endow them with more than ordinary energy. They go everywhere at a canter and the boys either run alongside or ride side-saddle. A man is never seen astride on a donkey in Siwa, but women invariably ride astride on their infrequent jaunts abroad.

There are about six horses and thirty head of cattle in the oasis. Dogs of the well-known yellow variety are frequent, cats are very rare. There are no rats, but many mice.

No camels are kept as the Jaffar fly is very prevalent in Siwa. For this reason the Arabs always make haste to finish their business and get away. This fly is found in Siwa, Gara, Maraghe, and Khamisa; but the oases of Laraq and Bahrein to the south, and Sittra, to the east, Girbe, Um Ghazlan, Um Gharbe and Shiata to the west, are all said to be free from it.

Of wild animals the jackal is the most common and comes right up to the town on his nightly prowls. Hyænas are rare and keep to the surrounding hills. Gazelle are found in the small patches of scrub a few miles from Siwa, but very rarely come near the town; they are very difficult to approach. Duck and coot are found on the salt lakes, and also out at Shiata, a beautiful oasis and lake about twenty-five miles west of Siwa.

## SUPERSTITIONS.

The Siwans are intensely superstitious and resort to magic and astrology on all occasions.

The evil eye is ever present to them, and weird and many are the charms made use of to avert its spell. Most houses, all springs, and many trees and hedges are festooned with clusters of beneficent emblems such as camels' skulls, the dried legs and heads of donkeys, gazelle heads and horns, bones of all descriptions, twigs, bundles of grass and broken

pottery, whilst personal charms are carried by nearly everybody.

When a man dies his wife is shut up for a period of four lunar months and ten days. She is dressed entirely in white and confined to one room, being allowed one girl attendant who brings her food and necessaries, but does not stay with her. During this period she is known as "Aghoula." At the end of the period, the town crier gives forth that the aghoula will proceed to Ain Tamoosa to bathe on such and such a morning. On this day no one in the town ventures forth until she has completed her purification and returns to her house, as the direst consequences are supposed to light on any one on whom her gaze falls, until her period is completed.

Djinns and Afryts are everywhere. They generally come from underground or from the springs, and all lonely places are haunted by them. They are bad spirits and mischievous. Afryts sometimes emerge from the wells and increase in size until they reach heaven, and sometimes they take the shape of prodigious sheep, cattle, or donkeys. Very often they play music, but no one can approach the place where the music is heard.

The Melaika are the good spirits and they are found both underground and in the sky.

Should a man fall and hurt himself a meglis of very old wise women assembles at the site of the accident.

They light a fire and cook a large plate of porridge. This is eaten in silence, a small portion being left for the Melaika. Incense (Kusbar or Gawy) is burnt, and the oldest witch speaks an incantation to the Melaika urging them to remove his sickness and pointing out the patient's virtues and his poverty. Next day, if any portion of the food is left, it is considered of most happy augury, and is given to the patient to eat.

If the patient is unconscious, his clothes are taken with a sum of money to the Wakeel of Sidi Sliman, who sleeps with them under his head for a night. This does the patient a power of good.

Women who desire husbands proceed to Bir Ahmed by

night and sprinkle themselves with water from it; and it is considered part of the marriage ceremony for the woman to bathe in Ain Tamoosa on the wedding night.

Several women are adepts in the making up of love philtres which are said to be unfailing in their results.

Many of the Siwan hegabs or charms are in great demand in Egypt.

#### SIWAN ANTIQUITIES.

*The Temple of Jupiter Ammon*, about one and a half miles east of Siwa. Only about a dozen huge blocks with hieroglyphic inscriptions are left standing; numerous others are lying about half buried in the sand. A few marble blocks indicate where a small chamber was built of this material.

A small fountain about thirty yards to the west of the temple is pointed out as the "Fountain of the Sun"; it is nearly filled up, and quite insignificant.

The ruins in Aghourmi town are of well laid masonry. Two doorways are still standing; there are no inscriptions to be seen.

*Gebel Dakroor*.—A range of hills about two and a half miles east of Siwa. The two large peaks are called Ydrar Nadriach and Ydrar Nasra (Ydrar=mountain). In Ydrar Nasra there is a rock-hewn cave called Tenashoor, with six square supporting pillars.

Passing round the western face of the same rock a couple of Greek inscriptions will be found cut in large capitals and several in smaller writing, and just above will be found an ancient quarry.

Under the summit of Ydrar Nasra is a large rock chamber called Tenifan or the Beit es Sultan. It is cut in pure limestone and has the remains of six columns still depending from its roof. Opposite the door are three rooms, the middle one of which is about twelve feet long. There is another room in the right wall, and to the left of the main entrance is a recess about  $3 \times 1\frac{1}{2} \times 2$  feet. A deep shaft in the centre of the floor is nearly completely filled up. Various fragments of Greek inscriptions are cut in the limestone walls.

*Gebel Muta* or *Mesabereen* is about half a mile to the north

of Siwa. This hill presents a very striking appearance, being absolutely riddled with tombs from base to summit. The tombs generally consist of several chambers opening off a main entrance hall and extend downwards by means of a flight of stone steps. In a few some traces of hieroglyphic writing remain, and in one tomb is a fragment of relief. The hill has been thoroughly plundered from time to time, and it is doubtful if any of the tombs have escaped. Thousands of bones are lying about.

Such inscriptions as exist have been described by Steindorf, who visited the hill in 1900, and careful notes of it were made by Mr. O. Bates, F.R.G.S., who accompanied me to Siwa. Some of the tombs on the north of the hill are inhabited by poor Arabs.

Other tombs exist at Karret el Belad in the western part of the town of Siwa, at Khamisa, Fitnas, Meshenditt, Ain el Megahiz and the pass leading to Girbe from the Oasis.

*Kasr er Roum.*—There is a group of ruins between Khamisa and Maraghe, about seven miles west of Siwa, which are locally known by the name of Kasr er Roum. It is composed chiefly of fragments of mud brick buildings, the walls of which are in places two feet thick. A couple of broken offering tables, a small altar, fragments of pottery and human remains, are lying about in the sand. Turning over some stones idly, I found here and photographed two fragments of a tablet with a carved Greek inscription in sandstone. The letters were cut and then painted with a magenta coloured dye.

Many tombs exist in the hill above the ruins; some of those on the lower level have a small antichamber with semi-circular arched niches on each side of the inner door. There are also two bases of square stone pillars to be seen and one room of laid stone masonry is still complete.

A quarter of a mile further west are the remains of a temple and the locality seems to have been of some importance in Early Christian times. It was here that the books were found which were burnt by the Siwans, as described in the history forming part of this report.

*Ain el Koraichid* is about eighteen miles east of Siwa.

There are several Roman remains here of walls and doorways in good condition, but I saw no inscriptions except some Arab tribal symbols. At the time of my visit a new doorway was being unearthed by labourers in a mound to the west of the spring, while digging for Sebbakh. A stone with a fragment of inscription in Greek was discovered at the same time, and it would seem that this locality might repay careful investigation.

It is said that there are also antiquities at Zeitoun, but I did not visit this place.

In most of the smaller oases west of Siwa, at Girbe, Shiata, Um Ghazlan and Maraghe, there are numerous rock cut tombs. Besides these there are many tombs formed merely of flat heaps of stones; the mummy being placed in a rough stone bed with palm ribs bound along the sides under the wrappings. These tombs are generally found on spurs of low hills and plateaux.

Many of them have been opened, but a number remain untouched.

At Maraghe many of the empty tombs are inhabited by Siwans.

It seems regrettable that nothing is being done to preserve what remains of the temple of Jupiter Ammon, or to investigate the undoubtedly interesting antiquities which are to be found in this lonely oasis.

## A LOCAL HISTORY OF SIWA.

### PART II.

#### AN ACCOUNT OF SIWA ACCORDING TO LOCAL TRADITION.

BY OMAR MESELLIM.

NOTE.—The following account of Siwa was taken down from the dictation of Omar Mesellim, a Siwan notable, who compiled it from some old papers and from local tradition.

No attempt has been made to elaborate the very disconnected and sometimes irrelevant story, which is less a history

than a geographical dissertation on Siwa and its surroundings, leavened with a proper assortment of fairy tales.

The second part of the "History," in its latter part at any rate, is fairly correct, and the inevitable fate of the various governors gives ample evidence of the disturbed state of this "Island of the Blest," owing to the never ending struggle between east and west.

Their last big fight was in 1897, when seven Sheikhs, including the notorious Hassouna Mansour, were killed, and 180 rank and file killed and wounded. Since then comparative quiet has reigned in the little community.

The Hamilton episode I include as showing the gift of the Siwan for intrigue, as indicated by the wily progress to power of the western Sheikh at the expense of his hereditary enemy the easterner.

The first man who built Siwa was a king of the race of Akhmim el Talib. He sent people to the near west from Egypt to inspect the place; afterwards he sent his son and a great army with engineers and builders, and carpenters and workmen, and they began to build the town. They made it in seven degrees, the first for the king's son, who was governor, the second for the engineers, the third for the princes, and the rest for the people generally. The king gave them good advice—not to quarrel with each other, and that each one should rest content with his lot.

After finishing the town they came and reported to the king what they had done. He told them to cultivate the land and improve it, and to repair and clean the springs.

They grew corn and bleleg (it is not known what bleleg is) and zafran and cane sugar, and became very rich in crops.

They governed the country from Barka to the Arabian Desert and Aswan and Nubia, and they sent workmen to Bahrein (two days south-east), and Kitabein and Doura (south). Others went to Negwein, and Dakhla, Kharga, Baharia and Farafra.

After taking the advice of their magicians and priests and astrologers, they built Um Beda (temple of Jupiter Ammon) and put a magician in charge of it, called Ammōn. Ammōn was a woman. And they called it Um Beda or Mabūda, and it is to the east of Ain el Shems. And visitors came to it from far countries which were all under the king's sway.

The king made a statue for the temple which he called Siwa, and from this statue the oasis gets its name. It was before this called Santria.

And Ain el Shems is a spring near Mabūda—the water in it changes hourly; it is sometimes yellow, sometimes red, and hot or cold in turns. The king appointed 1,000 guards for it and changed them daily. And no reason can be assigned for such a marvellous spring, though some say that magic was used for it. After a long time it has been filled up, either at the time of King Rashām or that of King Amrūs.

And about Karret el Khazeena, now called Aghourmi, it used to be inhabited by El Tawat and Darbi and Darthi, and parts of it are still called Darbi and Darthi. The stone was for the temple of Mabūda.

And about Dakroor—it was called Abriq after the last king of that region when Siwa was divided into two on account of its decay. He took the east, and the west was taken by King Fariq.

The King of the west had the springs at Khamisa and Badein. Khamisa was named after a queen of that name. Near Khamisa and a little below it is Karret Baleesa, called now Abalees, and here they cultivated cotton in old times, but it is now all salt.

Siwa extended to the country of Alexandria and Nubia and Balad el Ghaffār.

Between Siwa and Alexandria it was twelve days' journey through uninhabited places, which were originally inhabited. And there was a place called El Maghrara (Moghra?), three days from the Wady Natron. And there was another place called El Quattara which still exists. And between Siwa and a town called Lakk it is three days' journey west. Lakk is now called Jarabub, and in old times the people there used to take their water from reservoirs of rain water, because their land was salt and the water not sweet.

From Siwa to Awidjleh in Tripoli it was nine days' journey, and to the country of Nubia it was seven days'.

But the original Santria is not known now. Some Siwans say that they have been to Bahrein and found a track going

to the south while they were collecting dates. They followed this track for two days and then they found a well marked road and a statue of four lions, two facing north and two south.

And these lions were black. They found a hattia and a dark valley, and came on a hill which caused a feeling of terror when they approached it. They wanted to enter the valley, but a strong sandy wind prevented them. They became feeble and returned to Bahrein after many fatigues.

Another story is that an Arab went to this place and saw a dead man as he approached it. And near the man was a palm branch from the hattia of 12 arms' length.

The original king of the country was a Greek and a Christian. Once when the King of Tripoli asked him for help, he sent him 80,000 men all of the same age and all mounted on horses of the same colour. They were victorious. The kingdom continued to be Greek until the time of Sidna Omar el Khattab, the Prophet's Khalifa. When Sidna Khaled went to the Beheinsa, the King of Siwa was an ally of the King of Egypt and sent him help. But on one occasion he sent him many thousands of men, who after leaving Bahrein encountered a very bad wind, and they were nearly all killed. The Siwan King destroyed everything in Siwa on hearing the news, and filled in the springs and even the sweet wells and turned Karret el Mesaberin into a cemetery. For he knew by means of magic that the Mussulmans would take his country and would live to the west of Mabūda on the hill of Mesaberin, for the sake of the springs there. In this hill was a spring called Zeitoun, and this he filled in with four blocks each weighing twelve cantars. It was on the east of the hill now called Gebel Muta.

And after the destruction of the last Christian king, the Mussulmans took Siwa, but they were very few. They were partly Beni Hilal and partly Arabs and Berbers, who lived in the eastern part and Bahrein and Negwein.

But the history of the near west and of Dakhla and Kharga and Santria is another history. Santria at that time extended from Wahat el Kharga to Negwein and Balad el Ghaffar and Bahrein, and was partly inhabited by the Beni Hilal who

came and camped near the mountain Galoot. And to the east of Galoot is Egypt. The Beni Hilal were 9,000 in number, and were told to invade Santria and lay it waste by the governor of Egypt on account of many rebellions there.

*Kharga and Dakhla.*—The whole country of Kharga and Dakhla was wild, with but few inhabitants. There was much water and many palms and other trees and many wild cows and sheep. Between these oases and Nubia was three days' journey through desolate country. There is crossing these oases a high mountain; in it was iron and bronze, which was brought from it to Egypt and wrought there. There were large snakes which swallowed calves and sheep and even men.

And Dakhla was inhabited by Berbers and Arabs and there were many small villages with plenty of water and palms, and it was a barrier between Egypt and the desert. Between Dakhla and Aswan were wild asses which could not be ridden, and if taken from this country they died.

To the south of these oases was Ard el Ghaffār. Now it is desert, but in old times it was a very prosperous country, and they grew bleeg, saffron, usfar and cane sugar. Now there are only two towns remaining, El Ghaffār and El Bahrein(?).

There were many palms there, and a river from which a traveller could drink for two days' journey.

But Santria was inhabited by Berbers and some Arabs and had many palm trees and sweet springs for drinking. And between it and a mountain called Kalamri in which iron was found was four days' travel.

Between Santria and Awidjleh was a mountain called Bareem el Ahmar, and between Santria and Alexandria an uninhabited desert. But there are buried cities there which are not seen except by chance.

It is said that in the time of Abd el Aziz Ibn Marwan, when governor of Egypt (A.H. 50), a man came and told him that while searching for a lost camel he found a ruined city in which was a big tree bearing every kind of fruit. He ate from it and took some of the fruit away. A Copt who was present said that this was one of the two towns called Hermis,

and that there were many treasures in it. Abd el Aziz sent out an expedition with supplies for a month; they traversed the whole desert, but found nothing.

Again, one of the Egyptian governors punished some of the people, who afterwards escaped into the desert. After some time they found a goat which ran away into a hill; they followed it and found a town with people in it.

The people paid no taxes, and had trees, and streams and gardens, and had no contact with the outside world. After staying for a long time here, the refugees returned to Egypt. They afterwards wished to return to the desert oasis, but could not find it.

And Musa Ibn Nasr, in the time of Beni Umeyr (A.H. 80), was an astrologer, and travelled for seven days to the south-west. He saw a big town with iron gates which he tried to open, but owing to the sand he was unable to do so. He sent some of his men to open it, but they were attacked from inside and some were killed. So failing in his purpose he returned to Egypt.

And another Egyptian was told that there was a town in the Santria country in which there was treasure. He made his preparations and travelled out for three days and found a large town with trees and rivers and a moat all round it. There was one tree of which he took leaves and put them on his feet and so passed over the water to the city. He entered the city, found much gold, and took away as much as he could carry. He went to the governor of Upper Egypt, related his adventure, and showed him the gold. The governor sent out an expedition with this man, but they failed to find the city.

And about Barka. It was in old days a very big city, and the people cultivated saffron, but now it is deserted.

And about Negwein. This was a great country continuous with Nubia and having Tripoli on its west. Most of its land is now uninhabited desert. There is plenty of water, but its towns are all buried in the sand. This sand spreads all over from Selgamassa to Nubia. It is very open country, and one can traverse it for three months. It is one of the boundaries of Egypt, and Egyptian armies have often in-

vaded it. And it is said that Lokman el Hakim, the philosopher, who was in the time of David, was born at Ayla, in the country near Nubia.

### THE MODERN HISTORY OF SIWA.

BY OMAR MESELLIM.

After the destruction of *Bahrein, Negweïn and Santria*, some people say that a certain devout man from the west dreamed that in Siwa the ground was rich like that of Purgatory, and he came here with his family. He pitched his camp first at Ain Zamorr (now Fitnas) and grew palm trees there, and these palms are said to have been brought from Giri in Upper Egypt. He also grew palms for the Wakf of the Prophet. After some time he made a pilgrimage to Mecca and recounted there tales about Siwa. The people of Medina did him great honour, and appointed him a special location in the Roda.

On returning from Mecca he brought some Arabs to Siwa, and they settled down there and increased to the number of forty.

They appointed a judge among themselves whose name was Soori. One family of his descendants is living in Siwa and is called the Hebeishat. The devout man's descendants are now represented in Siwa by the family of Sid Hussein.

These Arabs built an oil press on the top of the mountain, and of this traces remain. They grew Saidi dates, and repaired the spring called Makra, now called Ain Tamertin, and the cultivation round this spring is called "Marrab" to this day (*i.e.*, the proprietors have a right to free repairs to their spring by the community).

All went well until the population reached 160. They treated travellers well, and especially pilgrims. Then the King of Tripoli heard of them. He sent them presents and they made an alliance with him and were taken under his protection, and he made Siwa a Zawia of Tarabolus.

At this time Sidi Sliman el Walv died. the son of Omar Mesellim el Waly; he is called in the Siwan language to this day Ammi Mesellim.

Both he and his father were judges of the Siwans. Ammi

Mesellim lived outside the town and died there, where his tomb exists at present.

The people of Tebu, in the Sudan, were used to make raids into Siwa yearly, until Sidi Sliman's time. He made prayers against them on one occasion and they were buried to their waists in sand. This frightened them and they did not come again. He let them depart in peace to their own country.

He further prayed that the road by which they came might be blotted out and no one knows it until this day.

Afterwards there was a judge in Siwa called Hassan Mitnana; his family are represented now by the Mitāneen, a branch of the Asakra. He died. Nothing important happened in his time.

Then appeared another judge called Sidi Sliman, who died without male issue. After his death the quarrels between east and west began, the country being divided into three parts.

1. East.—The Adelsa, Zoraiyeen, and Haddadeen.
2. West.—Aulad Musa, Sarahna, Shagayeen.
3. Aghourmi.

The Haddadeen were at first in Aghourmi, but during a quarrel, the people of Aghourmi attacked the Haddadeen while repairing a well, and killed some of them. The Haddadeen then joined the east.

The Adelsa used to live in the west in a place called Beghdad, now called Baqoota; they were attacked by the people of the west and left the west to join the east.

Both have their origin from a tribe of Arabs in Tripoli called Mehameen. From the Mehameen also are the Sarahna (from them the family of Mansoor), and the Aulad Abu Amēera and El Henādy. The Abu Amēea came from Akaba, the Henādy from Minia.

Some of the people also came from Djalo and Awidjla; some also from Aulad Suliman in Tripoli; some from Behga, near Minia; and some barbarians from the Sudan. Others of the people of Siwa are of the original Christian stock, and yet others of the Aulad Baghi in Tripoli.

This division of the people obtained until 1222, when the quarrel arose between the Sharqyeen and Gharbyeen. The

easterners wanted to dig a tunnel in the town, and the westerners prevented them; 72 of the westerners were killed, and 28 of the easterners, not counting wounded. This fight took place on the sand south of the town, near the house of Mohamed Said. A second fight took place in the Rabit el Meharrika, and a third in Turan el Tobbo (near Khamisa).

For this reason one Aly Baly went to Cairo in the time of Mohamed Aly Pasha, and reported that there was a savage country called Siwa.

1815.—The Pasha sent soldiers in 1235 who attacked and conquered Siwa and put a tax of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  milliemes on each palm tree. After a time the Siwans rebelled. Aly Baly again went to Cairo and returned with another army. They conquered Siwa again, and raised the tax on each palm to  $22\frac{1}{2}$  milliemes. Aly Baly remained as governor for seven years. The Sharqyeen killed him. His son asked for punishment for the murderers, but the Sharqyeen refused to give them up.

Then Musa Boobish was governor until he was in turn killed.

His cousin asked for punishment, but it was refused, so he complained to the Government. They sent 1,400 soldiers, and he took his revenge, and collected the taxes. He was strong and severe. He was killed. After him Sheik Yussef ibn Aly was governor for two years. And when Abbas I of Egypt died and Said came to the throne, a general pardon was made for prisoners, so the Siwan prisoners returned to Siwa and killed Yussef ibn Aly.

Sheik Hamza Abu Ghalba was then made governor over the Sharqyeen and Sheik Hallak over the Gharbyeen. Before them Mohamed Maarif had been judge and Omar Mesellim Mufti in Siwa, but Yussef ibn Aly killed them both. Afterwards the Government sent Mamurs and Governors until the present time.

*Translation of Note on the Detention of Hamilton, the English Traveller, at Siwa, in 1850.*

In 1269, in the time of Omar Mesellim and Sheikh Mahmud Maarif in the east, and Mansoor Hussein in the west, and Giri in Aghourmi, the Englishman came travelling. One

Sheikh named Yussef ibn Aly went to him and told him the easterners were going to kill him. Yussef himself had been to the easterners and incited them to kill the Englishman.

He advised the Englishman to take refuge in his (Yussef's) house at the top of the town. The Englishman went there at sunset. Shortly after sunset the easterners came to the Englishman's tent and fired into it. And the Englishman was looking on from the house on the hill. The Englishman sent a messenger to Cairo and forty soldiers came to relieve him. They took him and Sheikh Yussef to Cairo.

Sheikh Yussef came back with many soldiers and was made governor; he took away forty-one people from the town, and remained governor until he was killed by the Sharqyeen.

#### PRINCIPAL ROUTES TO SIWA FROM NORTH AND WEST— DISTANCES.

##### *Principal Routes.*

I. *Masrab el Akhwan*.—From Siwa to Jarabub  $2\frac{1}{2}$  days, thence north to Bengahzi 15 days. Passes through Girbe 15 miles north-west of Siwa, runs north of Um Ghazlan and Shiata and Um Gharbe. Good water at Girbe (two springs) and water at Shiata by digging in the sand. There is a good well a day north of Jarabub said to be 70 spans deep (the span being the stretch of both arms). Another branch of the *Masrab el Akhwan* goes west to Djalo (10 days from Siwa) and thence south to Kufra—about 15 days from Djalo. There is a good water supply on this route to Kufra and it is the one generally used. Kufra may be reached in 12 days from Siwa itself, but there is no defined road and no water. The route *via* Jarabub and Djalo takes from 25 to 30 days.

II. *Masrab el Garan*.—Runs north and west from Girbe to Bengahzi and Barka, about 18 and 15 days respectively from Siwa. Sawinno well two days out from Barka. Steep and difficult pass at Girbe.

III. *Masrab el Shugg*.—North from Girbe to Dafna and Sallom, 7 to 9 days from Siwa.

The two principal passes into Siwa itself from the north are Negub Megahiz and Negub el Baggar, about 5 miles

apart. Various roads leading from the north converge on the big Masrab Establ, and Siwa is entered through either of these passes. The chief of these converging routes are :—

IV. *Masrab el Saferdjîn*.—From Dafna.

V. *Masrab el Khamsa*.—From Bamba (Sidi Barrani).

VI. *Masrab el Gatran*.—From places between Bamba and Matro.

VII. *Masrab Establ*.—From Matro.

VIII. *The Gara Road*.—Runs east from Siwa and then north-east to Gara (Um es Sagheir) 70 miles off. From here it is 6 days north through Qattara to Dabba. There is good water at Gara, and passably good water at Qattara.

There is no direct road between Tripoli town (Tarabolus) and Siwa—any one coming from Tripoli to Siwa would pass first through Benghazi, 15 days from Tripoli, and then 15 to 20 days more to Siwa. All the date traffic from Tripoli is carried on with Murzuk in Fezzan and there is practically no communication with Siwa.

*Distances from Siwa for Baggage Camels.*

*Mersa Matro*.—7 days. Water at Kanais 2 days south.

*Dabba*.—8 days. Water at Qattara and Gara.

*Bagbag* (Turkish post on frontier).—6 days. Water at Bir Sainey.

*Bamba* (Sidi Barrani).—6 days.

*Dafna*.—7 to 9 days. Rain water and grazing at Hattia el Ekhala 3 days from Dafna.

*Tebruk*.—10 to 12 days.

*Batnan*.—12 to 15 days.

*Barka*.—15 days. Saurimo Well 2 days from Barka.

*Benghazi*.—18 to 20 days.

*Kufra*.—25 to 30 days via Jarabub and Djalo with good water supply; 12 hard days from Siwa direct—no water, road hardly ever used.

*Jarabub*.—2½ days.

*Djalo*.—10 days.

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