

## “The Identification of Emmaus”

from *Selective Geographical Problems in the Life of Christ*,

a doctoral dissertation by J. Carl Laney (Dallas Theological Seminary, 1977).

The village of Emmaus was the destination of two of Jesus' disciples when they encountered the risen Lord on Resurrection Sunday. As they walked along together this One whom they did not recognize "explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures" (Lk. 24:27). It was not until the evening meal at Emmaus that their eyes were opened and Cleopas and the other disciple realized the identity of their traveling companion. They arose that hour and returned to Jerusalem to report to the eleven their experience on the road to Emmaus and how they recognized Jesus while He was breaking bread (Lk. 24:13-35).

The identification of biblical Emmaus would seem at first sight to be relatively simple. Since Emmaus is mentioned only once there are no different texts to be harmonized. Luke 24:13 records that Emmaus was a village 60 stadia (about seven miles) from Jerusalem. The only parallel passage does not mention the name of the locality and records only the appearance to the two disciples "while they were walking along their way to the country," (Mk. 16:12).<sup>1</sup> The main problem with Emmaus is that the traditional site, 'Imwas, is 20 miles from Jerusalem whereas the biblical text indicates the place should be found within a seven mile radius of Jerusalem.

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<sup>1</sup>Though debated, the last twelve verses of Mark are probably authentic. See William R. Farmer, The Last Twelve Verses of Mark (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp. 1-124.

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### The Suggested Identifications

The sites which have been suggested as possible locations for biblical Emmaus include: 'Imwas, Khamasa, Kiryat el 'Enab, Kolonieh, Urtas, and el-Qubeibeh. Which site best fits the geographical requirements given in the biblical text?

#### 'Imwas

From ancient times 'Imwas ('Amwas) or Nicopolis, where Judas Maccabeus defeated the armies of Nicanor and Gorgias in 165 B.C. (1 Macc. 3:40, 4:3), has been identified as biblical Emmaus. The city was fortified in 160 B.C. by Bacchides (1 Macc. 9:50) and became the capital of its district around the middle of the first century B.C. When a nationalistic band of Jewish robbers attacked a Roman cohort in Emmaus around 4 B.C., Varus retaliated by burning the city to the ground.<sup>1</sup> Emmaus was rebuilt and by A.D. 66 had become the chief town of the toparchy.<sup>2</sup> In A.D. 221 the Emperor Elagabalus conferred the status of a polis ("city") on Emmaus, renaming it Nicopolis, "the city of victory." A Byzantine church was erected there, and a

Crusader church now stands on its ruins.

Eusebius (A.D. 265-340) was the first ancient historian to identify 'Imwas with the Emmaus of Luke's Gospel. He writes, "Emmaus where Cleopas came from, the man mentioned in Luke's gospel, is now Nicopolis, a famous city in Palestine."<sup>3</sup> Jerome follows him in this identification in his Latin translation of the Onomasticon. This identification has enjoyed the

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<sup>1</sup>Josephus Antiquities xiv. 275; xvii. 282, 291.

<sup>2</sup>Josephus War iii. 55.

<sup>3</sup>Eusebius Onomastica Sacra 257, 21-23.

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support of pilgrim tradition through the ages, and has been confirmed in modern times by the American geographer Edward Robinson. He bases his identification on the fact that from the earliest period of which we have any record after the Apostolic age, the opinion prevailed in the Christian church that Nicopolis was the scene of the Lukan narrative. Only in the 14th century do traces of another identification appear. Robinson concludes:

Thus, for thirteen centuries did the interpretation current in the whole church regard the Emmaus of the New Testament as identical with Nicopolis. This was not the voice of mere tradition; but the well considered judgment of men of learning and critical skill, residents in the country, acquainted with the places in question, and occupied in investigating and describing the Scriptural topography of the Holy Land.<sup>1</sup>

The French geographer F. M. Abel also argues for the traditional identification, and joins with Vincent in a classic examination of the history of Emmaus.<sup>2</sup> The basic approach of those who identify 'Imwas with Emmaus is to lean heavily on tradition and then seek to answer the geographical objections to the site. Can the geographical objections to 'Imwas be satisfactorily answered?

The first and greatest objection to the site of 'Imwas is its distance from Jerusalem. 'Imwas is situated between 166 and 180 stadia from Jerusalem--the distance varying according to the particular route taken.<sup>3</sup> This distance approximates 20 miles or almost three times the 60

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<sup>1</sup>Edward Robinson, Later Biblical Researches in Palestine and the Adjacent Regions, 2nd ed. (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1857), p. 148.

<sup>2</sup>F. M. Abel, "La Distance de Jerusalem á Emmaus," Revue Biblique 34 (1925), pp. 347-67; L. H. Vincent and F. M. Abel, Emmaus, sa basilique et son histoire (Paris: Leroux, 1932), reviewed by J. W. Crowfoot in Palestine Exploration Fund, Quarterly Statement 67 (1935), pp. 40-47.

<sup>3</sup>A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels, ed. James Hastings, s.v. "Emmaus," by Lucien Gautier, 1:515. A stadion is equal to 607 English feet; 60 stadia are equivalent to 6.89 miles.

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stadia mentioned in the biblical text. However, in response to this objection the advocates of

'Imwas are quick to point out that Codex Sinaiticus reads "160 stadia from Jerusalem," and thus points to 'Imwas.<sup>1</sup> Abel assumes that Luke wrote 160 and this was changed in the second century by those who thought a journey of 160 stadia twice in one day would be incredible.<sup>2</sup> Lagrange, on the other hand, explains that 160 is a scholarly emendation traceable to Origen and occasioned by the local tradition of Emmaus-Nicopolis.<sup>3</sup> In considering the internal evidence, DeGuglielmo concludes that a change by some scribe from 60 to 160 is more likely than from 160 to 60. He writes:

In history we are well acquainted with an Emmaus at a distance of 160 stadia from Jerusalem; this same Emmaus figured prominently both in Jewish and Roman history. On the other hand, history is notably silent concerning an Emmaus situated at a distance of 60 stadia from Jerusalem. This fact could naturally have caused or influenced a change from 60 to 160, but hardly from 160 to 60.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, both internal and external evidence supports the reading of 60 which disqualifies 'Imwas as a possible site for biblical Emmaus.

The second objection has to do with the return of the disciples the same evening so as to meet the still assembled apostles. While 160 stadia appears to be a doubtful reading, one must consider whether or not it would have been possible to travel twenty miles to Emmaus, dine "toward evening," when the day had "declined" (Lk. 24:29), and then have returned

<sup>1</sup>The reading is also attested by K, Θ, Π, the Palestinian Syriac and Armenian versions.

<sup>2</sup>Abel, "La distance de Jerusalem à Emmaus," p. 356.

<sup>3</sup>M. J. Lagrange, "Origene, la Critique Textuelle et la tradition topographique," *Revue Biblique* 5 (1896), p. 91.

<sup>4</sup>Antonine DeGuglielmo, "Emmaus," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 3 (1941), p. 295.

to Jerusalem in time to find the disciples still gathered after their evening meal (Lk. 24:33). Although most would agree that such an extensive day's journey would be difficult, Robinson argues that it would not be impossible or improbable. He states that the distance from Emmaus to Jerusalem could have been traversed in five hours, and that the two disciples could have left Jerusalem in the early afternoon to arrive at 'Imwas about 5:00 PM and returned to Jerusalem by 11:00 PM, a round trip of about 40 miles.<sup>1</sup> Schiffers similarly holds that the two disciples could have departed from Emmaus toward sunset and returned to Jerusalem before midnight.<sup>2</sup> In defense of 'Imwas as the site of Emmaus, Bishop writes, ". . . we are surely not obligated to take it for granted that, because they walked down to Emmaus--providentially as it transpired--they necessarily walked back."<sup>3</sup> He suggests that having procured "reasonably responsive" donkeys, Cleopas and his friend could have covered the distance in five hours or less.

While one could not deny the possibility of a one day 40 mile journey by the two disciples, the time indicators in the narrative reveal that this was probably not the case. The crucial question is, "When did the disciples depart again for Jerusalem?" Luke 24:29 indicates that they arrived at Emmaus "toward evening" or when the day had "declined." The two expressions indicate the same thing--that it was late afternoon and nearing darkness.

DeGuglielmo considers the phrase pros hesperan ("toward evening") and compares it with a similar expression found in the Septuagint

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<sup>1</sup>Robinson, Later Biblical Researches in Palestine, p. 150.

<sup>2</sup>M. Schiffers, "La question d' Emmaus," Revue Biblique 2 (1893), pp. 31-37.

<sup>3</sup>Eric F. F. Bishop, "Where was Emmaus? Why not 'Imwas?'" The Expository Times 55 (1943-44), p. 153.

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translation of Judges 19:8-9. He concludes that it limits the time to not more than two hours before nightfall.<sup>1</sup> Since in the latitude of Jerusalem sunset occurs at Passover between 6:15 and 6:30, and darkness sets in between 7:35 and 7:55, the earliest possible time the disciples could have entered Emmaus would have been between 5:35 and 5:55 PM.<sup>2</sup> According to custom, the evening meal would not have commenced until or after sunset. Certainly at least an hour passed from the time they entered the village until the meal was prepared. It was probably not until around 7:00 or 7:30 that the meal began and the disciples recognized their Guest as He broke bread. They rose up that hour to carry the news to Jerusalem (Lk. 24:23).

Jerusalem is not only 20 miles from 'Imwas, but 2,000 feet above it, and so one would have to add about an hour traveling time to the return trip. The five hour journey would stretch to six, and perhaps longer due to the darkness and the tired condition of the travelers. If they left Emmaus at 7:00 PM they could have arrived at Jerusalem no earlier than 1:00 AM. There is no foundation in the text for the hypothesis that they used "responsive donkeys" to hasten their return trip to Jerusalem.

It is hardly likely that Cleopas and his friend would have found the apostles still assembled at the late hour of 1:00 AM. In addition, the text of John 20:19-23, which is parallel to Luke 24:36, would rule out the possibility that it was after midnight that the disciples joined the assembled apostles. John 20:19 relates that the appearance of Christ took place in the "evening" (opsias). DeGuglielmo's study of this word reveals that it can be used in a technical sense to refer to the first of the four vigils into which the Romans divided the night, or the period from 6:30 to

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<sup>1</sup>DeGuglielmo, "Emmaus," pp. 295-96.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 297.

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9:30 PM. Used in a non-technical sense it may refer to that time of day around sunset.<sup>1</sup> Either way, it is quite improbable that the two disciples could have left Emmaus after sunset, traveled an arduous 20 miles uphill, and arrived in Jerusalem by 9:30 in the evening. Implicit in the narrative is the fact that Cleopas and his friend returned to Jerusalem in the early evening, thus an identification of 'Imwas with Emmaus is quite improbable.

The final objection raised against 'Imwas is that Luke calls Emmaus a "village" (kōmē), a term hardly applicable to Nicopolis which was the capital of a toparchy and designated by

Josephus a "city" (polis).<sup>2</sup> Robinson responds to this objection stating that since Varus had burned Emmaus shortly after the death of Herod, Luke's term is appropriate for a place partially in ruins and without walls.<sup>3</sup> In addition, it is doubtful that a sharp distinction is made in the New Testament between kōmē and polis. However, DeGuglielmo appeals to Mark 16:12-13 to show that the destination of the two disciples was the country (eis agron), not a city. He understands this term to refer to a smaller than usual village or hamlet

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<sup>1</sup>DeGuglielmo, "Emmaus," p. 298. A study of opsios as found in the New Testament indicates that it is generally used in a non-technical sense referring to the closing part of a day, or from sunset until dark. It is used with reference to the end of the work day (Matt. 20:8), the time of the evening meal (Matt. 14:15, 23, 26:20, Mk. 14:17, Jn. 20:19), and sunset (Matt. 16:2, Mk. 1:32). John uses it with reference to the time when the disciples went down to the sea (Jn. 6:16). When they embarked for Capernaum "it had already become dark" (Jn. 6:17). John apparently uses the term with reference to the early evening before the "night" (Jn. 3:2, 13:20, 21:3).

<sup>2</sup>Josephus War iii. 55, iv. 444-45; Antiquities xii. 298, xiii. 15-16.

<sup>3</sup>Robinson, Later Biblical Researches in Palestine, p. 149.

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(Mk. 6:56).<sup>1</sup> While Mark may be simply indicating that the disciples encountered the risen Lord as they left Jerusalem for the less populated countryside, it is also possible that Mark intends to make reference to the rather small community of Emmaus. If the latter is indeed the case, then the Emmaus of Luke's gospel could hardly be Nicopolis, the capital of the toparchy.

### Khamasa

Conder has proposed that the ruined site of Khamasa, situated 8½ miles southwest of Jerusalem near the modern village of Wadi Fukin, is the New Testament Emmaus.<sup>2</sup> From Conder's account, Henderson judges that Khamasa seems quite suitable as the site of biblical Emmaus.<sup>3</sup> There is a Roman road leading from Jerusalem to the plain near Bet Guvrin which comes within close proximity of the site, and the remains of a 12th and 13th century church are found there. Conder bases his identification primarily on the etymology of the place-name "Khamasa" and the distance of the site from Jerusalem. He believes that Emmaus is a corruption of the Hebrew name "Hammath" ("hot spring"), indicating the existence of a thermal spring. He points to Josephus' explanation of the Emmaus of Galilee as evidence of the connection between Emmaus and Hammath,<sup>4</sup> and then seeks to demonstrate the transmission of the name Hammath (or Ammaus) to the Arabic "Khamasa."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>DeGuglielmo, "Emmaus," p. 300.

<sup>2</sup>C. R. Conder, "Emmaus," Palestine Exploration Fund, Quarterly Statement 8 (1876), p. 173.

<sup>3</sup>A. Henderson, "On the Site of Emmaus," Palestine Exploration Fund, Quarterly Statement 8 (1879), p.

107.

<sup>4</sup>Josephus War iv. 11; Antiquities xviii. 36.

<sup>5</sup>Conder, "Emmaus," pp. 172-73.

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The etymological connection between Emmaus and Khamasa is quite dubious, however, especially since the explanation given by Josephus is of the name "Ammathus," not Emmaus! The derivation of the place-name "Emmaus" is yet uncertain.

Conder's second argument in favor of the identification is the distance of the site from Jerusalem. In his first article on Emmaus he writes that Khamasa is about 8 miles from Jerusalem, but later he admits, "the distance of Khamesa [Khamasa] is 8½ English miles (some 70 stadia) in a straight line, and 10 by road."<sup>1</sup> The 10 mile journey by road is the equivalent of 86 stadia. Since it has been determined that the correct text of Luke 24:13 designates Emmaus as 60 stadia from Jerusalem, Khamasa would have to be disqualified as a possible location for the site.

### Kiryat el 'Enab

In the first edition of The Land and the Book Thomson proposed that Kiryat el 'Enab (Kuriat el 'Aineb) or modern Abu Ghosh might be the site of biblical Emmaus.<sup>2</sup> His main argument for the site is its distance from Jerusalem. The site is located nine miles west of Jerusalem on the road to Jaffa. Meron Benvenisti also presents this site as the Emmaus of Luke's gospel.<sup>3</sup> Henderson notes this proposal, but objects to the identification because the Greek tradition in its favor is of doubtful value, and the present place-name is ancient. It is not likely that Kiryat el 'Enab was

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<sup>1</sup>C. R. Conder, "Lieutenant Conder's Reports," Palestine Exploration Fund, Quarterly Statement 13 (1881), p. 274.

<sup>2</sup>William M. Thomson, The Land and the Book, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1859), 2:540-41.

<sup>3</sup>Meron Benvenisti, The Crusaders in the Holy Land (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960), pp. 347-49.

also known as Emmaus.<sup>1</sup> In addition, its distance from Jerusalem, 9 miles or 78 stadia, is too great for the site to qualify as biblical Emmaus. Thomson apparently became aware of these objections for he abandoned the identification in the second edition of his book.

### Kolonieh

Another site suggested to be that of biblical Emmaus is Kolonieh (Kuloniyeh, Kolonia). This proposal has been advanced by Birch and adopted by Savi.<sup>2</sup> The site is located just 4½ miles or 39 stadia west of Jerusalem. This place is probably the "Ammaous" which, as Josephus records, was colonized by 800 discharged Roman soldiers.<sup>3</sup> Just one mile to the north is a ruin called Beit Mizzeh which has been identified with the Mozah of Joshua 18:26 and the Musah (or Mauza) of the Talmud which it says was made a colony. Birch concludes that since two independent sources mention the founding of a colony, the Mozah of Joshua and the Ammaous of Josephus are in all probability identical.<sup>4</sup> The similarity of the name Ammaous with the Septuagint translation of Mozah (Amōsa) confirms the identification of the sites.<sup>5</sup>

Having made the unwarranted assumption that the "Ammaous" which was

<sup>1</sup>Henderson, "On the Site of Emmaus," p. 106.

<sup>2</sup>W. F. Birch, "Emmaus," Palestine Exploration Fund, Quarterly Statement 13 (1881), pp. 237-38; P. Savi, "Emmaus," Revue Biblique 2 (1893), pp. 223-27.

<sup>3</sup>Josephus War vii. 217. While the Emmaus mentioned by Josephus is said to be 30 stadia from Jerusalem, the distance approximates that of Kolonieh. The variant, "sixty," is probably a harmonization with Lk. 24:13.

<sup>4</sup>Birch, "Emmaus," p. 237.

<sup>5</sup>A. Kennion, "Emmaus," Palestine Exploration Fund, Quarterly Statement 16 (1884), pp. 247-48.

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colonized by discharged Roman soldiers and the Emmaus of Luke's gospel must be the same, Birch looks for the site in the vicinity of Kolonieh. However, there is no certain connection between Josephus' Ammaous and Luke's Emmaus. It is even possible that the name "Kolonieh" is derived from the Septuagint place-name "Koulon" (Josh. 15:59), not the latin word colonia, and hence, has nothing to do with the Ammaous of Josephus or the Musah of the Talmud.

Birch recognizes the objection that Kolonieh is too near Jerusalem to fit the biblical qualification for the site and suggests that the Wadi Buwai in which Kolonieh is situated was a district which the 800 discharged Roman soldiers occupied. The head of the valley would be 7½ miles from Jerusalem, and there biblical Emmaus would be located.<sup>1</sup> Conder was impressed with Birch's arguments and writes, ". . . Mr. Birch's proposal may be considered considerably to strengthen the case in favour of Kolonia."<sup>2</sup> However, the fact remains that Kolonieh is presently too near Jerusalem to qualify as the biblical site. There is no historical basis for Birch's conjecture that biblical Emmaus was colonized by Roman soldiers, shifted from its site at the head of the Wadi Buwai to within 4½ miles of Jerusalem, and lost its name to Kolonieh.

### Urtas

Mrs. Finn, the wife of Jerusalem's British Consul, proposed in 1883 the identification of Urtas (Artas), situated 7½ miles south of Jerusalem, with biblical Emmaus.<sup>3</sup> Her identification of the site is both adopted and

<sup>1</sup>Birch, "Emmaus," p. 237.

<sup>2</sup>Conder, "Lieutenant Conder's Reports," p. 274.

<sup>3</sup>Mrs. Finn, "Emmaus Identified," Palestine Exploration Fund, Quarterly Statement 15 (1883), pp. 53-64.

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defended by Mearns.<sup>1</sup> This identification is based in large measure on the etymology of the name Emmaus as given by Josephus. In describing Tiberias on the Lake of Gennesaret, he writes that there are warm baths not far away in a village named Emmaus.<sup>2</sup> In another place he says that the name may be interpreted as meaning "warm baths," being derived from a spring of warm water within the city.<sup>3</sup> Finn concludes that the Emmaus of Luke's gospel must be in a place with an abundance of water, and where there were baths. In addition, the site must be small enough to be considered a village, and within a radius of sixty stadia of Jerusalem (Lk. 24:13). There four qualifications appear to be met at Urtas where a copious perennial spring is

found at the required distance from Jerusalem. The village is small but there are remains of ancient buildings. Existing in the shadow of the fortified city of Etham, Urtas was probably never more than a village, thus answering to the term used by Luke. In addition, excavation in 1861 brought to light several Roman baths or tanks similar to those found at Pompeii. While this identification is exciting and seems to meet the biblical requirements, there are several objections which must be considered.

In the first place, Mrs. Finn mistakenly infers that Josephus' explanation of the meaning of Galilean Emmaus would apply to every city by that name. Josephus certainly does not intend it to be understood that the name "Emmaus" always has that meaning, for there is no trace of there ever being a hot spring at Emmaus-Nicopolis. It may be noted as well that

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<sup>1</sup>P. Mearns, "The Site of Emmaus," Palestine Exploration Fund, Quarterly Statement 17 (1885), pp. 116-21.

<sup>2</sup>Josephus Antiquities xviii. 36.

<sup>3</sup>Josephus War iv. 11.

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Josephus interprets the name "Ammathus" which is similar, but not identical with the name Emmaus.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, while it would not be questioned that remains of Roman baths have been discovered at Urtas, this is no indication that the original name of the place was "Bath" (Emmaus as Finn understands its etymology). Every place that has baths is not necessarily called "Bath." Henderson comments:

The existence of a bath, or baths, in a valley down which flows abundance of water is not, prima facie, a thing so special as to explain the distinctive name of a village. If every place is to be recognized as a possible "Emmaus" where the name "Hamman" is found, we shall have plenty to choose from.<sup>2</sup>

There are two sites which bear the name "Hamman" (Arabic for "bath") in the same valley below Urtas.<sup>3</sup>

Another objection raised against this identification of Emmaus is that there is no evidence to show that the "bath" of which Mrs. Finn writes is of the age she assumes--that it was old enough to give its name to the place known to Luke and Josephus. She suggests that the foreign marble, style of capitals, the glass and pottery found there would indicate the baths were constructed by Herod the Great and therefore must have existed before Luke and Josephus wrote about Emmaus near Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup> However, there is no historical evidence that Herod constructed any royal baths at this location. The earliest baths in Palestine were constructed by Herod

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<sup>1</sup>Josephus Antiquities xviii. 36, War iv. 11.

<sup>2</sup>A. Henderson, "Emmaus," Palestine Exploration Fund, Quarterly Statement 16 (1884), pp. 243-44.

<sup>3</sup>Conder and Kitchener, The Survey of Western Palestine, 3:98.

<sup>4</sup>Finn, "Emmaus Identified," p. 62.



at Masada and Herodium and consisted of an apodyterium (disrobing room), a frigidarium (cold bath), a tepidarium (warm bath), and a caldarium (hot bath) which contained tubs and facilities for a steam-bath.<sup>1</sup> These Herodian baths are much different from those described by Mrs. Finn. The fact that Herod traveled from Jerusalem to Callirrhoe on the northeast shore of the Dead Sea to bathe when he was mortally ill would suggest that the baths discovered by Mrs. Finn had not been constructed at that time.<sup>2</sup> It is doubtful that Herod would have traveled that distance in his condition had baths been available just 7½ miles south of Jerusalem.

The final objection to the identification of Urtas with biblical Emmaus is that Jerome who resided in Bethlehem just 1½ mile north of Urtas locates Emmaus at Nicopolis in his translation of the Onomasticon.<sup>3</sup> It seems unlikely that such an important place would be so entirely forgotten by the days of Jerome, and that he, living close by, should have entirely overlooked it ascribing to Nicopolis the honor of being Luke's Emmaus. The objections to identifying Urtas with Emmaus cast a dark shadow on Mrs. Finn's optimistic statement that "beyond all cavil or doubt" biblical Emmaus has been brought to light.<sup>4</sup>

#### el-Qubeibeh

The modern village of el-Qubeibeh (el-Kubeibeh, Qubeiba, El Qubebe), west of Nebi Samwil on the road which runs northwest from Jerusalem, has

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<sup>1</sup>Archaeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land, s.v. "Baths and Bathing," p. 45.

<sup>2</sup>Josephus Antiquities xvii. 171; War i. 657.

<sup>3</sup>Onomastica Sacra 121, 6-8.

<sup>4</sup>Finn, "Emmaus Identified," p. 62.

been suggested as a possible site for biblical Emmaus.<sup>1</sup> The site of el-Qubeibeh (meaning in Arabic, "little dome") is 7 miles or 63 stadia from Jerusalem which agrees almost exactly with the sixty stadia of the biblical text (Lk. 24:13). The Crusaders in 1099 found a Roman fort there called Castellum Emmaus.<sup>2</sup> Since they knew of Emmaus-Nicopolis, and its acceptance by Eusebius as the Emmaus of Luke, they had no occasion to invent the name.<sup>3</sup> The Franciscans noted church ruins there in 1852. In 1861 they purchased the site, and in 1902 they erected the present modern church above the ruins of the older structure. According to their excavations, the older church was a Crusader basilica which was built on an even more ancient structure which may have been a Byzantine church. Some think this ancient structure was a house of the Roman period--perhaps the very house of Cleopas around which the sanctuary was later erected.<sup>4</sup> Additional excavation near the church in 1943 confirmed the existence of a village which had been occupied during the Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine periods.

The primary objection raised against this site for biblical Emmaus is the lateness of the tradition. While some might object that the Crusader tradition is late and therefore doubtful, the Crusader identification is based on their knowledge of a Roman fort called Castellum Emmaus. Thus, the name Emmaus has been associated with the site of modern el-Qubeibeh

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<sup>1</sup>Henderson, "Emmaus," p. 244.

<sup>2</sup>Jack Finegan, The Archaeology of the New Testament (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 177.

<sup>3</sup>Henderson, "Emmaus," p. 244.

<sup>4</sup>Finegan, The Archaeology of the New Testament, p. 177; Conder and Kitchener, The Survey of Western Palestine, 3:17.

since the Roman period. The very name el-Qubeibeh ("little dome") indicates the existence of a church marking a holy place.

Caiger objects to this identification stating that the name "Emmaus" implies the existence of a hot spring, of which there are none in the neighborhood of el-Qubeibeh.<sup>1</sup> This objection, however, is based upon a mistaken inference from Josephus' explanation of the Emmaus (or more correctly "Ammathus") near the Sea of Galilee.<sup>2</sup> Josephus certainly did not intend that the name always had the meaning "warm bath" implying the existence of a hot springs. Roman baths, it should be noted, were frequently heated artificially and needed no natural hot spring.

Kopp also objects to the identification of el-Qubeibeh with biblical Emmaus. He states:

Although it was inhabited in the time of Eusebius and Jerome, it did not attract their attention. If it had borne the name Emmaus at that time, these men and later pilgrims would certainly have turned eagerly towards it on account of the sixty stadia.<sup>3</sup>

We should note, however, that biblical Emmaus was a small village or hamlet (Lk. 24:13, Mk. 16:12), and may have declined by the time of Eusebius (A.D. 265-340). Emmaus-Nicopolis, on the other hand, had in A.D. 221 been raised by Elagabalus to the status of a city and renamed Nicopolis. It is not surprising that Eusebius and Jerome named this prominent city the Emmaus of Luke's gospel, especially if the other Emmaus had declined to the point of insignificance.

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<sup>1</sup>Stephen L. Caiger, Archaeology and the New Testament, 2nd ed. (London: Cassel and Company, LTD, 1948), p. 90.

<sup>2</sup>Josephus Antiquities xviii. 36; War iv. 11.

<sup>3</sup>Kopp, The Holy Places of the Gospels, p. 401.

### Steps Toward A Solution

While it appears as though el-Qubeibeh is the site of biblical Emmaus this conclusion must be checked by the recognized steps to site identification. In considering the written sources we find that Emmaus is mentioned only once in the gospels (Lk. 24:13). Josephus makes mention of an Emmaus or more exactly "Ammathus" on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee.<sup>1</sup> He also makes reference to the Maccabean Emmaus (1 Macc. 3:40, 4:3, 9:50), located 20 miles west of Jerusalem, which became the chief town in its toparchy.<sup>2</sup> Finally he mentions an "Ammaous" situated 30 stadia from Jerusalem where Vespasian founded a Roman

colony.<sup>3</sup> The geographical indicators in the text of Josephus would indicate that the place-names he mentions are in no way connected with the Emmaus of Luke's gospel.

The best text of Luke 24:13 indicates beyond reasonable doubt that Emmaus should be found within 60 stadia or approximately 7 miles of Jerusalem. The variant reading of 160 stadia was probably introduced as a result of associating the biblical Emmaus with the city by that name which figured prominently both in Jewish and Roman history. A change from 60 to 160 would be quite natural, but a change from 160 to 60 quite unlikely. Thus, internal textual criticism supports the external textual evidence in favor of the reading 60 stadia. Biblical Emmaus must be found approximately 60 stadia or 7 miles from Jerusalem. Sites too near or too far away must be disqualified as possible locations on the basis of this geographical

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<sup>1</sup>Josephus Antiquities xviii. 36; War iv. 11.

<sup>2</sup>Josephus Antiquities xiv. 275, 282, 291; War iii. 55.

<sup>3</sup>Josephus War. vii. 217.

consideration.

While Josephus sheds light on a possible meaning of "Emmaus," he certainly does not intend his explanation of the Emmaus (or "Ammathus") of Galilee to be applied to all cities by that or a similar name.<sup>1</sup> The etymology of the place-name Emmaus in Luke's gospel is uncertain. The name of the site which is the correct distance from Jerusalem, el-Qubeibeh, means in Arabic "little dome," and indicates that a domed structure (probably a church) was at the site in antiquity. The site could have lost its true name, Emmaus, as in the case of other biblical sites whose old names have been rediscovered in modern times.

Excavation at el-Qubeibeh has revealed that the site was occupied in the Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine periods. Excavations have also uncovered the ruins of a Crusader church and a structure which may have been a Byzantine church or perhaps a house from the Roman period.<sup>2</sup> Archaeological excavation has, then, demonstrated that the site was occupied in the time of Christ, and was a small community, thus meeting the requirements of Luke 24:13 and Mark 16:12.

Tradition, an important consideration in identifying any site, can be very helpful but must be employed with caution. In studying the problem of the identification of biblical Emmaus the geographer is faced with a dilemma. He must choose between the best tradition and the best text. The oldest tradition clearly favors 'Imwas as biblical Emmaus.<sup>3</sup> Dalman

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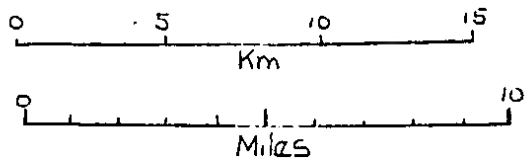
<sup>1</sup>Josephus Antiquities xviii. 36; War iv. 11.

<sup>2</sup>Finegan, The Archaeology of the New Testament, p. 177.

<sup>3</sup>Kopp, The Holy Places of the Gospels, pp. 395-97. It should be noted, however, that this tradition is not without exception. See Avi-Yonah, The Madaba Mosaic Map, p. 64.

Map 8

Suggested Sites for Emmaus



• Imwas

• el-Qubeibeh

• Kiryat el Enab  
(Abu Ghosh)

• Kolonieh

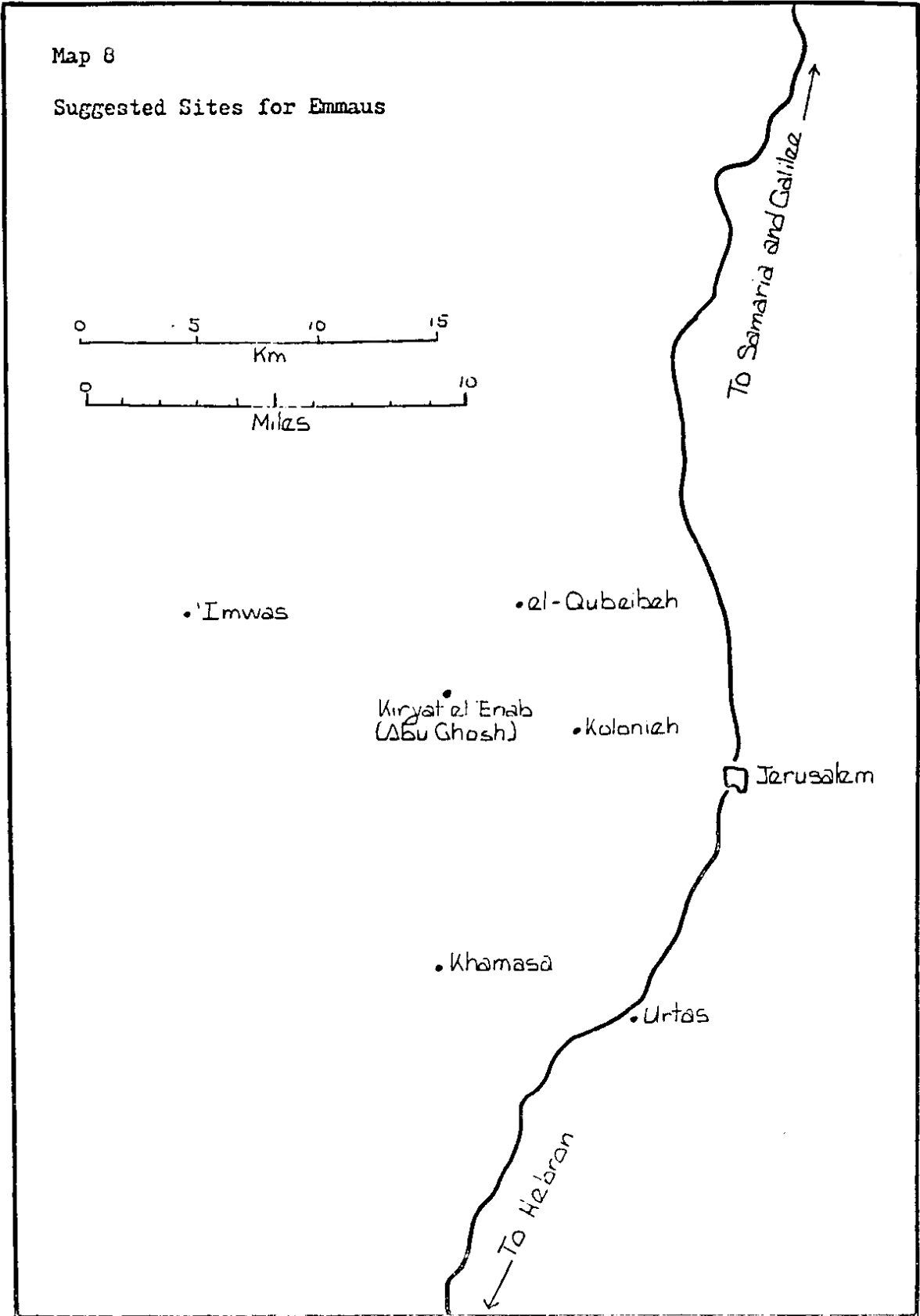
□ Jerusalem

• Khamasa

• Urtas

To Samaria and Galilee →

← To Hebron



concludes, "So it is best to follow the tradition and disregard the Lukan estimate of distance."<sup>1</sup> No biblical scholar, however, could simply "disregard" the inspired text of Luke 24:13. DeGuglielmo sums up the matter well when he writes, "...in the last analysis Scripture must be considered the principal authority in this discussion, and Scripture indicates a site 60 stadia from Jerusalem--a condition met with only in El Qubebe."<sup>2</sup>

Of the many sites set forth for biblical Emmaus, the site which meets the distance requirements most adequately is el-Qubeibeh situated just 63 stadia northwest of Jerusalem. The site was occupied in the biblical period and has a strand of tradition reaching to Roman times which associates the name "Emmaus" with the place. The site was clearly recognized as a holy place in ancient times as indicated by the ruins of a Crusader basilica and perhaps a Byzantine church. A strong pilgrim tradition would be helpful in confirming the identification of el-Qubeibeh as biblical Emmaus, but unfortunately this tradition is in favor of 'Imwas. For the biblical geographer, however, tradition must always take second place to the geographical indicators of the gospel record. The Bible reveals that Emmaus was sixty stadia from Jerusalem—a condition met only by el-Qubeibeh.

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<sup>1</sup>Dalman, Sacred Sites and Ways, p. 229.

<sup>2</sup>DeGuglielmo, "Emmaus," p. 301.