

The Edomites in Southern Judah.

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IN the Hebrew writings of the Persian period we encounter repeated allusions to the northward advance of the Nabataeans, who invade the districts lying south and east of the Dead Sea, including especially the territory of Moab, Ammon, and Edom. The encroachment of these Arab tribes on the domain of their more civilized neighbors on the north is a fact of considerable significance for the history of the Jews. As the Nabataeans, pushed from behind,¹ gradually moved northward, the Edomites were the chief sufferers from their advance; and these in turn, being at length driven out from their old territory, were forced into southern Palestine, of which they finally gained possession; certainly not without a fierce and protracted struggle. The result was a complete shifting of the position of these two peoples; the Nabataeans ultimately occupying old Edom, while the Edomites moved into the region (new Edom, or Idumaea) lying between the southern part of the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean, territory formerly occupied for the most part by the tribe of Judah.

There is certainly every reason for supposing that the gradual advance of the one people was on the whole contemporaneous with that of the other.² The encroachment of the Nabataeans must have begun to be serious at least as early as the seventh century B.C. Even Ezekiel could prophesy with the utmost confidence (25⁴, 5, 9, 10) that

¹ Such shifting of tribes has been an important feature of the history of Arabia. Cf. especially the extensive migrations in the second century A.D. (Müller, *Islam*, i. 27).

² See especially Cheyne, *Introd. to Isaiah*, p. 210 f., where many of the principal facts are brought together. Professor Cheyne's conclusions differ widely from my own, however. He regards Mal. 1⁸⁻⁵ as referring to a Nabataean attack on the Edomites while the latter were still in their old home, and supposes the main step in the northward advance of these two peoples to have taken place in the latter part of the fifth century. See also Wellhausen, *Israel. u. jüd. Geschichte*, p. 147.

Ammon and Moab — also Edom and the Philistines (vs. 12-17) ? — shall be wiped off the face of the earth by the Arab invaders.

The first definite information that we have regarding the Nabataean occupation of old Edom is in an account of the campaigns of Antigonos in this region in the year 312 B.C., preserved by the Greek historian Diodorus (xix. 94 ff.).³ At that time, the Arabs were in full possession, and apparently had been for a considerable time; at all events, the historian of the expedition, who had been at some pains to inform himself about these nomads, evidently supposed them to be the old inhabitants of the land. From passages of this same narrative in Diodorus it appears that the Edomites also were at that time firmly established in their new domain. Thus xix. 95: ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰδουμαίας ἐπαρχίας; cf. 98, in which the Dead Sea is said to lie κατὰ μέσην τὴν σατραπείαν τῆς Ἰδουμαίας.

Of the Old Testament passages which seem to refer to blows inflicted upon Edom,⁴ — Is. 34⁵ ff. 63¹ ff. Obad. 1-9 Jer. 49⁷ ff. Mal. 1²⁻⁶, — none can be dated with certainty; nor, if this were possible, would anything be gained for the history of these tribal movements, for new Edom had to suffer in the same manner as old Edom from repeated invasions of the Arabs. We have in the Old Testament, however, data for determining approximately the time when the principal advance of the Edomites into southern Judah took place. In Obad. 19, as Wellhausen has remarked,⁵ they are already established in *Idumaea*, including 'the Negeb and the Shephela.' But we have still earlier testimony to the same effect in Zech. 7⁷, a passage which has been sadly misused. It reads as follows: הַלּוֹא אֱלֹהֵי הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר קָרָא יְהוָה בְּיַד הַנְּבִיאִים הַרְאֵשִׁים בְּהִיּוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם יֹשְׁבֵת

³ The historical sources which Diodorus is copying in this part of his book seem to have been in the main trustworthy; see Wachsmuth, *Einleitung in das Studium der alten Geschichte*, p. 101 f.

⁴ The two passages in Isaiah (34, 63) which announce the approaching doom of the enemies of Israel, with special mention of Edom, may perhaps have been suggested by the arrival in Jerusalem of such tidings from the south as those which occasioned the utterance Mal. 1⁴. This is hardly more than a possibility, however, for at the time when these chapters were written (fourth century B.C.?) such oracles against Edom needed no particular occasion (see below). The passages in Obadiah and Malachi are much more definite and historically valuable. In the former there is evident reference to a Nabataean invasion (see especially Wellhausen, *Skizzen*, v². 206); while Graetz has shown (*Monatschrift*, 1875, pp. 60-66; *Gesch.*, ii. 2, p. 164) that the devastation of Edom described in the first verses of Malachi was also the work of these Arab neighbors.

⁵ *Skizzen*, v². 205.

⁶ So תא must be emended (Wellhausen).

ושלוח וצרייה סביבתיה והנגב והשפלה ישב, "Are not these the words which Yahwè proclaimed through the former prophets, in the days when Jerusalem and the surrounding cities were still in quiet, and when *the Negeb and the Shephela were still undisturbed?*" It has been customary to give to the participle ישב, ישבת in this verse a *passive* meaning (which it has nowhere else), and to translate, "when Jerusalem and . . . the Negeb and the Shephela were *inhabited.*" Thus Wellhausen: "als Jerusalem noch *bewohnt* und in Ruh und Frieden war, und ihre Städte ringsherum, und als auch der Karst und die Niederung *bewohnt* war."⁷ Nowack (*Kleine Propheten*, 1897) adds the note: "Man sieht, . . . wie wenig angebaut und bewohnt Juda um diese Zeit war." But, aside from the intrinsic difficulty of such an expression even regarded as a strong exaggeration, this translation is rendered quite inadmissible both by the well-known meaning of the verb ישב, and by the fact that Zechariah uses the very same expression in 1¹¹, where its signification is plain. No one would think of translating the words כל הארץ ישבת ושקמות by "all the earth is *inhabited* and in quiet"! At the end of 7⁷ the idea expressed by שלוח is to be supplied with ישב, where the repetition of the word would be awkward (so Köhler, *Nachexil. Proph.*, p. 223 f., where the passage is correctly translated). As for the meaning of the words, "while the Negeb and the Shephela were still undisturbed," there would be every reason, even without Obad.¹⁹, for supposing that Zechariah is referring to the Edomite invasion, the one great calamity which we know to have come upon southern Palestine not far from this time. And this probability is greatly strengthened by other important evidence. A few Old Testament passages (especially Ez. 35⁵⁻¹⁰ 36²⁻⁵ and Obad.¹⁸) seem to make it plain that the Edomites first succeeded in forcing their way into southern Judea and gaining permanent possession of the land *by taking advantage of the Chaldaean conquest* of Jerusalem and the surrounding cities (ירושלם וצרייה, Zech. 7⁷). Edom rejoiced in his brother's calamity; laid hands on his property when he was in distress; entered into possession of (verb ירש) a part of the territory of Israel when the land was weakened. It has been generally agreed that we have in these passages the evidence of an Edomite invasion of Judah following the Babylonian conquest; but the fact has not been recognized that the invaders *came to stay*. From a mistaken estimate of

⁷ So also the English A.V. and R.V.; Reuss; Marti in Kautzsch's *Heilige Schrift des A. T.*; cf. Buhl, *Gesch. der Edomiter*, p. 77.

the worthless list Neh. 11²⁵⁻³⁶, in which the Chronicler is narrating how 'all Israel' came back to the unoccupied land of Judah and Benjamin after the exile, it has been thought necessary to suppose that this occupation by the Edomites was only a temporary affair; that they were in some way dislodged by the Jews, and did not take permanent possession of the land (Idumaea) until some time in the latter part of the Persian period. The supposed retreat of the Edomites (into their former territory?) has been accounted for in various ways.⁸ The theory now in favor, that they were *compelled by the Persians* to give back their new possessions to the Jews (Smend, *Listen*, 21 ff.; Stade, *Gesch.*, ii. 111 f.; Buhl, *Gesch. der Edomiter*, 77) is a conjecture first put forth by Herzfeld,⁹ without external support or intrinsic probability.

The history of the Nabataean-Edomite migration would seem then to have been, in its main features, something like the following. Before the end of the seventh century, the Nabataeans began to press hard upon the Edomites. The latter were not long able to hold them back, but were soon obliged to yield up one portion of their territory after another to the invaders, or else to share it with them. Increasing numbers of the Edomites, driven from their old homes, began to force their way into Palestine, but were at first held in check. While matters were in this state, the Babylonians invaded Judea, in the early part of the sixth century. The Edomites, whose own condition was becoming desperate, turned the situation to account, and seized a part of the 'Negeb and the Shephela'; either by actually allying themselves with the Babylonians, or — what is more likely — simply by taking advantage of the temporary weakness of the land. Once firmly settled there, they were steadily reënforced; so that by the middle of the (sixth) century the main shifting had already taken place; the former territory of Edom being chiefly in the hands of the Nabataeans, while the Edomites had advanced into their new domain, which included the greater part of that which we find them occupying in the time of the Maccabees. At the same time, and as another part of this same movement, a portion of the old inhabitants of southern Judah, dislodged by the advancing Edomites, moved northward and settled wherever they could find a place; e.g. in and about Bethlehem (Wellh., *De Gentibus et Familiis Judaeis*,

⁸ According to Ewald (*Gesch. d. V. Israel*, 1864, iv. pp. 105-107) the Jews themselves finally succeeded in driving them back.

⁹ *Geschichte d. V. Israel*, 1847, i. p. 475; cf. 446.

1870, pp. 22-33). When Zechariah, writing in the year 518, speaks of the happy days of old 'before trouble came upon the Negeb and the Shephela,' the words refer (as would be natural to suppose, even without further evidence) to a catastrophe which had taken place either during his own lifetime, or at all events within the memory of some of those to whom he spoke.

The Old Testament passages above mentioned (Obadiah, Jer. 49, Malachi, Is. 34, 63), in which reference is made to disaster that has come, or is coming, upon Edom, are all post-exilic. Now that the Edomites were the next-door neighbors of the Jews, and were even crowding farther and farther into the sacred territory, the people of Jerusalem were in a way to be well informed of the devastating attacks of the Arabs, as these in turn invaded the Negeb and the Shephela.¹⁰ For this same reason — the proximity of the Edomites, with its continual menace — the Jews came to look upon this people as their peculiar enemies. The part they had played at the time of the Chaldaean conquest was never forgotten. Edom becomes the representative of hostility to Israel (Mal. 1¹⁻⁵; cf. especially Am. 9¹²). This way of using the name becomes more and more common; until, for example, among the Rabbinical writers "Edom" is a frequent designation for Rome. That in such passages as Is. 34^{5ff.} 63^{1ff.} Obad.²¹ etc., the name is used in its proper sense, referring to Israel's real (and typical) enemy, not as a figurative designation of Babylonia or (merely) of the nation's enemies in general, is made probable by the passage in Malachi, as well as by the more striking later utterance, Ps. 137⁷.

¹⁰ Buhl (*Gesch. der Edomiter*, p. 78), following Smend and Stade, finds in Mal. 1¹⁻⁵ evidence that the Edomites were still in old Edom in the days of this prophet (. . . "dass die Edomiter damals nur ihr eigenes Gebirgsland und nicht theilweise Juda bewohnten"). This interpretation of the words of Malachi, which is made necessary by the theory above mentioned combined with the supposed date of the prophecy, is quite arbitrary. As for the word *רִיבִי*, from which the argument is mainly derived, cf. Obad.¹⁹, where *רִיבִי* is actually interpreted by *רִיבִי עֲשׂו*!