

'Zared' or 'Αρεα'?

One Significant Detail in the Madaba Map

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Naḥal Zered — The Standard Identification

Transjordan, the east bank of the Jordan, unlike its west bank, is very schematic in structure. Most of it consists of an elevated flat plateau, divided by four brooks, or wadis, into five large blocks. These four wadis, known to the Arabs as (from north to south) Al-Yarmūk, Az-Zarqa, Al-Mūjib and Al-Ḥsā, are referred to in many contemporary maps as Yarmūk, Jabbok, Arnon and Zered. Three of these four names — Jabbok, Arnon and Zered — are well known from the Bible, being central points on the Israelites' journeys in Transjordan (Num. 21, Deut. 2, Judges 11). As the Jabbok and the Arnon are readily identified,¹ one would expect their southern 'companion' Zered to coincide with Wādi al-Ḥsā, rounding out the picture on the south. This is indeed the identification accepted in most encyclopaedias and reference works.²

¹ S. Loewenstamm, 'Arnon', *Encyclopaedia Biblica* 1, 598 (Hebrew); G.L. Mattingly, 'Arnon', *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 1, 398-9; Z. Kallai, 'Jabbok', *Encyclopaedia Biblica* 3, 455-8 (Hebrew); R.W. Younker, 'Jabbok', *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 3, 593-4.

² As represented by, say, J. Simons, *The Geographical and Topographical Texts of the Old Testament*, Leiden 1959, §439, 260; Y. Tsafir, 'Nahal Zered', *Encyclopaedia Biblica* 5, 811-12 (Hebrew); Y. Aharoni (trans. and ed. A.F. Rainey), *The Land of the Bible, A Historical Geography*, Philadelphia 1979, 37; G.A. Herion, 'Zered', *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 8, 1082. The same identification was commonly made in the travel and scholarly literature of the nineteenth century; see Ch.L. Irby and J. Mangles, *Travels in Egypt and Nubia, Syria and the Holy Land*, London 1844, 137; and cf. the references listed in H. Hildesheimer, 'Beiträge zur Geographie Palästinas', *Jahresbericht des Rab. Seminars zu Berlin*, Berlin 1885, 66 n. 485.

The Crucial Role of the Madaba Map

As stated, the identification of the biblical brook Zered as Wādi al-Ḥsā is based mainly on general geographical considerations; as a rule, neither the Bible nor any other ancient source supplies any real indication of its location. However, there is one ancient source in which scholars claim to have found an explicit identification with Wādi al-Ḥsā, namely, the Madaba map.

The Madaba map shows a brook flowing from the east into the southern part of the Dead Sea. The accompanying inscription is represented in all editions of the map and in all the standard reference works as [Z]APEΔ, commonly explained as referring to Wādi al-Ḥsā, which the map names 'Zared'.³ Hence one can conclude that in the Byzantine period — at least, in Christian traditions — it was customary to identify the biblical brook of Zered with Wādi al-Ḥsā. Of course, the biblical and historical geographer of today need not follow suit, but that view certainly provides a point of departure for discussion.

What Does the Map Really Say?

Upon close examination of the Madaba map, one cannot, I believe, escape the conclusion that the last letter in the name cannot possibly be deciphered as Δ; judging from its shape, the letter must be A, conforming with the shape of the A everywhere else in the map. The letter Δ is always a triangle, generally isosceles, with a horizontal base.⁴ In the A, however, the lower cross-line is almost always diagonal, its left end linked to the bottom of the left side.⁵ A good idea of the relative shapes of these two letters — written

³ Cf., e.g., M. Avi-Yonah, *The Madaba Mosaic Map*, Jerusalem 1954, 42 n. 16; Y. Tsafrir, 'The Provinces in Eretz-Israel: Names, Borders and Administrative Districts', in Z. Baras et al. (eds.), *Eretz Israel from the Destruction of the Second Temple to the Muslim Conquest*, Jerusalem 1982, 361 (Hebrew); H. Donner, *The Mosaic Map of Madaba*, Hague 1992, 41 n. 15; G. Schmitt, *Siedlungen Palästinas in Griechisch-römischer Zeit*, Wiesbaden 1995, 287, 339. It is noteworthy that in the most recent comprehensive publication about the Madaba map, E. Alliata, 'The Legends of the Madaba Map', in M. Piccirillo and E. Alliata (eds.), *The Madaba Map Centenary*, Jerusalem 1999, p. 60, this common identification (and expansion) is accompanied by a question mark.

⁴ See now J. Russell, 'The Palaeography of the Madaba Map', *ibid.* 127 and 128-129, who cites sixteen cases in the map itself, together with another nineteen representative examples from contemporary sources (ranging from 500 to 775 CE), all having the *delta* with a horizontal base.

⁵ Russell *ibid.*

consecutively — is provided by the name of the tribe of Dan, ΔΑΝ, inscribed in capitals in red near the bottom of the map.⁶

Moreover, to my mind, the completion of the Z at the beginning of the name should also be rejected. Taking the size of the letters along the line of the brook and the intervals between them into consideration, if one tries to complete the black line representing the edge of the mountainous ridge in the damaged part of the map above the first A in the name, there is no room left for another letter at the beginning of the name. [See figure 1.]

That is to say, the name written here is APEA (= Area). Those numerous scholars who read ZAPEΔ (= Zared) seem to have done so more out of wishful thinking than on the basis of the evidence itself.

What Topographical Object is Designated in the Map?

Moreover, further examination of this part of the map, combined with findings of the last few years, leads one even to question the geographical identification of the river/brook drawn here as Wādi al-Ḥsā. Close to the brook are three items which can be identified with absolute certainty. North of the upper part is [XAP]AXMWBA (= Charach Moba), that is, al-Karak (identified with biblical Kir of Moab); the steep hill on which it is built is clearly shown. South of the lower part of the brook is the village of ZOOPA (= Zoorā or Zoar), surrounded by date palms, in the valley southeast of the Dead Sea; above that, at the foot of a hilly massif, is the church of St Lot (TO TOY ΑΓΙΟΥ Λ[WT]). There is little doubt that 'Zoorā' is present-day Aṣ-Ṣāfi, close in the south to the point where Wādi al-Ḥsā empties into the salt marshes south of the Dead Sea. The Byzantine Church of St Lot has also been identified positively at a site discovered in the 1980s north of Wādi

⁶ Some authors have noticed this point. In the very first publication of the map, Clermont-Ganneau wrote: 'It should be noted that the last letter looks more like an *alpha* than a *delta*' (Ch. Clermont-Ganneau, 'The Madaba Mosaic', *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement* 1897, 200, 220). Braslavy also noted the fact in the 1950s (J. Braslavy, *Studies in Our Country, its Past and Remains*, Tel Aviv 1954, 261; [Hebrew]), and recently Alliata (see n. 3 above) enclosed the δ in angular brackets — [Z]αϵ<δ>. However, these suggestions have been rejected or completely ignored by other scholars; moreover, from the start they were made hesitantly, on the basis of what seemed to be biblical data favoring the identification with Wādi al-Ḥsā. This was actually a classic case of the chicken and the egg, each being considered the source of the other.

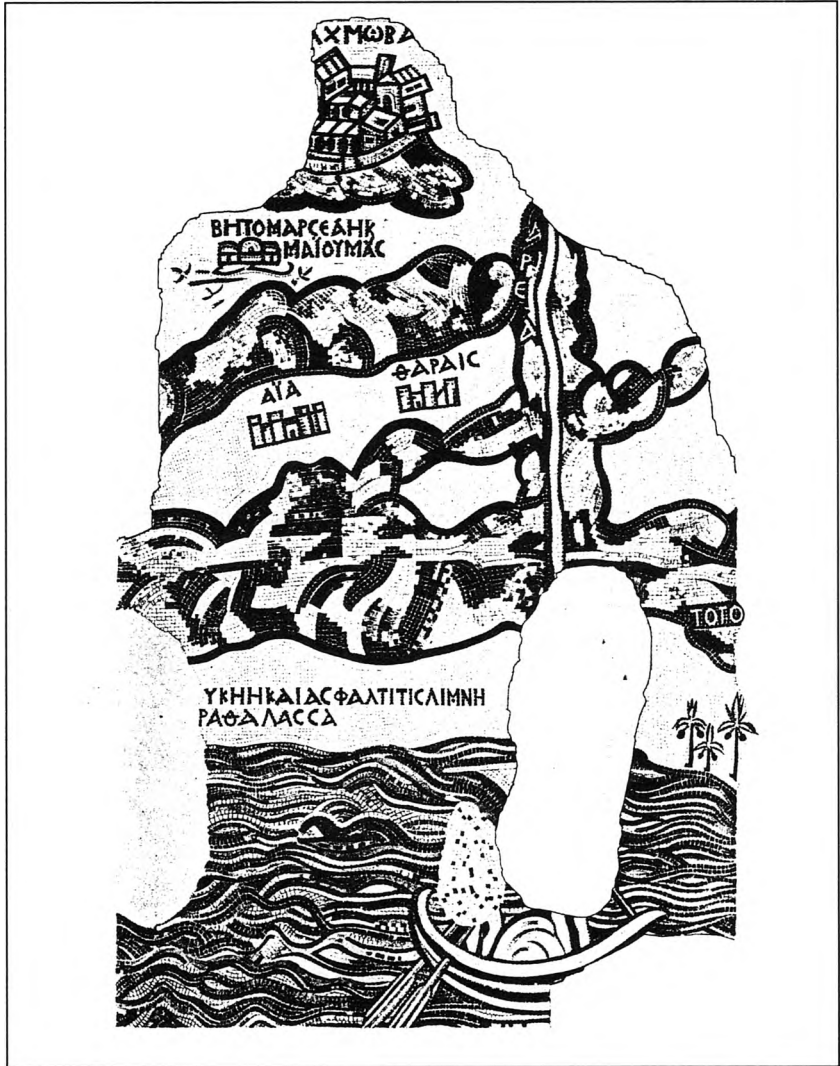


Figure 1

al-Ḥsā, on the side of a hill at the foot of Jabal al-Ḥsā.⁷ We may add that, although the distances and proportions in the Madaba map are far from accurate, the distance between the brook and 'Charach Moba' is similar to (slightly less than) that between the brook, on the one hand, and Zoora and St Lot's Church, on the other. The point where the brook empties into the Dead Sea leaves about one fifth of the sea to the south and about four fifths to the north. Given these data, the fit between the river marked in the map and Wādi al-Ḥsā is quite unsuccessful. Perhaps the cartographer was careless; alternatively, his memory may have betrayed him and he placed Wādi al-Ḥsā farther to the north than its actual course.⁸ At any rate, as a point of departure, the wadi as shown in the map might rather correspond to Wādi Ḥḏera or perhaps to Wādi al-^cIsal, the two main wadis draining the area between Wādi al-Karak and Wādi al-Ḥsā. In this connection, some consideration should be given to the identification of AIA and ΘΑΡΑΙΣ north of the brook and west of 'Charach Moba'.⁹ [See figure 2.]

⁷ The site is a cave, over which a church was built. A mosaic in the church names Lot; see Donner (above n. 3) 42; Schmitt (ibid.) 343; G. Barkai and E. Schiller, 'Eretz-Israel in the Madaba Map', *Ariel* 116, Jerusalem 1996, 102-103 (Hebrew); Alliata (above n. 3) p. 58 and cf. ibid. Bibliography, p. 267a.

⁸ So Donner 19: 'The artist was not very familiar with the area south of the Dead Sea, for he made the *Wādi 'l-Ḥasā* run directly into the Sea, whereas it comes out of the mountains and enters first the *Gōr aṣ-Ṣāfi*'. I see no need here to go into the question of the level of the Dead Sea and its extent in the Madaba map; in this connection, see the recent articles of N. Kadmon, 'The Madaba Map: Cartographic Aspects of an Innovative Topological Work', *Ariel* 116, Jerusalem 1996, 89-96 (Hebrew); and D.H.K. Amiran, 'The Madaba Mosaic Map as a Climate Indicator for the Sixth Century', *Israel Exploration Journal* 47, 1997, 97-99.

⁹ Clermont-Ganneau (above n. 6) 200, wrote that, on topographical considerations, the wadi in the map should be identified with Wādi Karak rather than with Wādi al-Ḥsā. In my view, he was right in principle, but Wādi Karak does not fit, because AIA, positively identified as the village of ^cAy, is marked in the map to the north of the wadi. As to the location of Tharais, there are several conjectures, none of which has a solid basis (cf. H. Ben-David, 'Identifying Aia and Tharais to the East of the Dead Sea', *Cathedra* 93, 1999, 57-66). However, if one accepts the most common identification (cf. Donner, above n. 3, p. 41 n. 14; Schmitt, ibid. p. 326) with ^cĒn Tar^cin / al-^cIrāq on the southern part of the same ridge, Wādi Ḥḏera could accurately fit the wadi designated here in the Madaba Map.

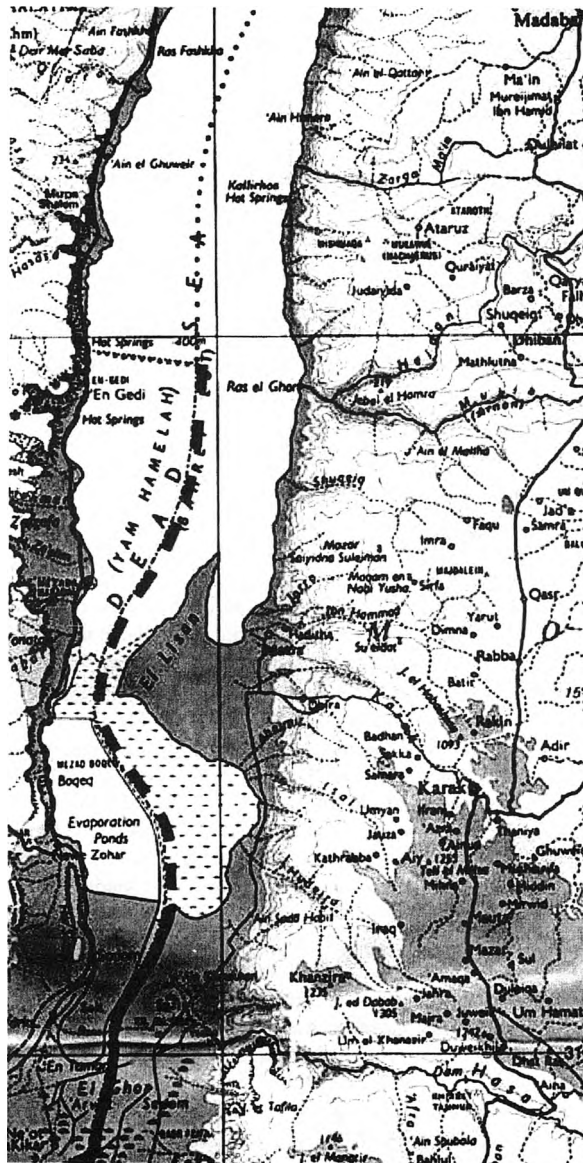


Figure 2

What is 'Area'?

If the correct reading of the inscription in the Madaba Map is not ZAPEΔ but APEA, we need to determine the meaning of this name. I have been unable to locate it in any source of the period, nor have I found a similar name in the later nomenclature. However, it recalls the name Ἀρεόπολις which, together with Charach Moba (= al-Karak), was one of the two main cities in the part of Moab south of the Arnon. Areopolis was the Greek-Roman name of Rabbat-Moab, today ar-Rabba, north of Karak, on the road to the Arnon.¹⁰ There is probably a connection between the Greek name 'Areopolis' and the biblical Ar. The biblical contexts in which Ar is mentioned are not absolutely clear, but the biblical text nevertheless seems to imply that 'Ar' was the name of the southern part of Moab — the part that was conquered neither by Sihon king of the Amorites nor by the Israelites. There are some grounds for the conjecture that there was also a city of the same name in the region.¹¹

Accordingly, it might be conjectured that 'Area' was the name of this whole region — the Greek successor to the territorial name 'Ar'. Not surprisingly, the main city of the region would then be known by the compound name 'Areo + polis' = 'the city of Ar'. This conjecture does indeed require us to assume that the artists who created the map were guilty of a slight misunderstanding. Presumably the original plan from which they worked will have had the name 'Area' spread over most of the hilly area west of Charach Moba; failing to understand what this really meant, they associated the name with the wadi. While we should not ignore the partial state of preservation of the Madaba map, we should also note that not one of the other riverbeds shown in the map in the Holy Land (there are seven in all) is designated by

¹⁰ Eusebius, *Onomasticon* 124, 17. The name Rabbat-Moab does not appear in the Bible or in any other Hebrew source. On the site and its sources see Schmitt (above n. 3), 287.

¹¹ G.A. Smith, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, Cambridge 1950, p. 34, explains the biblical text in this spirit. For a variety of opinions and an extensive bibliography, see B. Oded, 'Ar, Ar Moab', *Encyclopaedia Biblica* 6, 343-4 (Hebrew); J.M. Miller, 'The Israelite Journey through (around) Moab and Moabite Toponymy', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108, 1989, 590-5; G.L. Mattingly, 'Ar', *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 1, 321. To my mind, the crucial data are: (1) the three references to the name in Deut. 2, indicating that 'Ar' was a general designation for the part of Moab south of the Arnon; (2) the complementary parallel in Isaiah 15:1, most probably implying that 'Ar of Moab' and 'Kir of Moab' are two major cities of Moab.

name. This is in contrast to the Nile Delta, of which all the streams are designated.

As to the reason why a minor brook was drawn here, while the main wadi (Wādi al-Ḥsā) was not, it may be suggested that the wadis in the inhabited part of the country interested the map-maker more than the others. In any event, the fact is that drawing of the wadis in the Madaba map is not absolutely systematic; for example, Wādi Qelt and all the wadis in the western Jordan valley do not appear, while Naḥal Og (Wādi Mukallik) does.

Conclusions

1. The name 'Zared' does not appear at all in the Madaba map. The southernmost of the two rivers shown east of the Dead Sea is labeled 'APEA'.
2. The identification of this river with Wādi al-Ḥsā is also very dubious. More probably, the map is referring to a *wadi* farther north.
3. As a conjecture, it may be suggested that 'APEA' of the Madaba map should be associated with biblical Ar, on the assumption that the map-makers made a slight error in their placing of the inscription here.
4. In any case, whether the real identity of this 'Area' is known or not, the brook of Zared has nothing to do with the Madaba Map.

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