

Parah

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Parah

Parah (MT *pārâ* = “cow”; LXX Φαρα; Codex Alexandrinus Αφαρ; Vg. *Affara*) is a town in the eastern half of the tribal inheritance of Benjamin (Josh 18:23). Jerome translates the toponym Affara correctly as “calf or bull” (*Nom. hebr.* 24.20). Used with a deictic article (*happārâ*), this toponym is grouped with places like Bethel, Avvim, and Ophrah, and, therefore, should be located in the proximity of Bethel. Since Ophrah and Parah are written similarly, both toponyms could have been interchanged in the textual transmission. Thus, Parah (instead of Ophrah), Chephar-Ammoni, Ophni, and Geba could be a collection of sites in the region of Wādi Fāra and Wādi eṣ-Šuwēnīt. In that respect, there is no need to look for Parah in the vicinity of Bethel. In Byzantine times, the laura of Pharan, established by St. Chariton, used the name Parah. It was located close to the village of Pharan.

Due to its location and the preservation of the biblical name in the modern toponym, Parah is usually identified with Khirbet ʿĒn Fāra (1796.1380) in Wādi Fāra. This site has an important spring which still provides Jerusalem with water. The river Parath, where Jeremiah hid his loincloth, might be in close proximity to Parah (Jer 13:5), since this area is not

far away from Anathoth, Jeremiah's hometown. This river might run in the valley of Pheretae, a site which is well-known for its caves (Josephus, J.W. 4.512). Archaeological remains at Khirbet 'Ēn Fāra, dating to the Roman-Byzantine times, do not disclose a location for the biblical Parah. However, evidence from the Iron Age suggests that it might be located at nearby Khirbet Abū Musarraḥ (1773.1373).

Sometimes Parah is equated with Hellenistic Pharaton and identified with Tell el-Fūl (1323.1363), where the Hellenistic tower seems to evidence the fortification work of Bacchides. Though Tell el-Fūl matches the biblical description and the archaeological record, the fact that the upper two tributaries of Wādi Fāra have different names seems to call into question whether the ancient name has been preserved near the site. Moreover, the identification of biblical Parah with Hellenistic Pharaton is far from certain; the latter might be the Hellenistic name of biblical Pirathon.

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