

## Mearah

Erasmus Gaß

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### Mearah

Though generally a proper noun designating a hiding place (*mē'ārâ* "cave"), Mearah in Josh 13:4 seems to be a toponym pertaining to the Sidonian territory. The line from Mearah to Aphek describes a region in Lebanon not conquered by Joshua. This may be the place mentioned in Papyrus Anastasi I (19:2) called *mḡr*, although the spelling to be expected would be *mḡrt*, i.e., with a feminine ending. Guillaume de Tyr mentions such a cave in the region of Sidon (*Hist.* 19.11) which might be the biblical Mearah.

Just based on the criterion of the biblical name itself which has been preserved, the biblical place Mearah has been identified with a number of sites, among them: Muḡar Jezzīn, a complex of caves at the top of the Lebanon Range east of Sidon, or el-Muḡēriye northeast of Sidon. Unfortunately, the precise name of this place is disputed.

Since it is the starting point of the biblical place *min-'ad* geographic description, the original name might be 'ārā. This place might also be identified with 'Aruna mentioned in Egyptian texts (Thutmose III; Shoshenq). If read as 'ārā, the site at Hīrbet 'Āra (1579.2123), with its archaeological evidence dating to the Late Bronze and Iron Ages, would be equally possible assuming that Sidon had taken possession of this territory as well.

The LXX reads "before/from Gaza" (ἐναντίον Γάζης) rendering the Hebrew *mē'azzā*. But Gaza was certainly not part of the territory belonging to Sidon. The LXX most probably replaced an otherwise unknown Mearah with a well-known Gaza already previously referred to (Gazathites in Jos 13:3). In addition, *mē'arīm* ("from the cities [of the Sidonians]") or a scribal error ('r for correct *sr* = "Tyr") have been suggested. The preposition *min* may also have been lost due to haplography and Mearah may be the actual toponym. All in all, an uncertain textual basis makes a definitive identification of the location difficult.

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