

Michmethath

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Michmethath

Michmethath (*Mikmētāt* “red brown place”) is a toponym on the northern boundary separating Ephraim from Manasseh (Josh 16:6; 17:7). The name is derived from a root *k-m-t* with a prefixed *m* and suffixed *t*. It is possible that Josh 17:7 should be read *m’šd* “from the slope of” instead of “from Asher.” Since no territory for the tribe of Asher is known to exist, it is plausible the toponym is instead connected to a hill. Michmethath lies ‘*al pēnē*’ “in front of” Shechem (Josh 17:7), indicating that it is situated opposite Shechem, meaning that the two sites are within sight of each other but Michmethath is not necessarily situated in the east. Further to the east of Michmethath are Taanath-Shiloh, Khirbet Ta’na al-Foqa (1851.1759) and Janoah, Khirbet En-Yanun (1841.1739), whereas Michmethath is described as lying “on the north,” belonging to Ephraim’s allotment (Josh 16:6).

The biblical toponym may also be mentioned in the Amarna letters [^{URU}*Mi-ik-ma-te* (EA 257:21)], indicating that Michmethath – a vassal city of the Pharaoh – was settled in the Late Bronze Age. However, it is not clear whether this toponym is a settlement or a geographical landmark. In the first case, Michmethath is identified with Khirbet Ibn Naṣer (1792.1783), a place also called Khirbet Julejil with archaeological evidence dating to the Iron Ages, or with Khirbet Kafr Beta (1809.1775). Khirbet Maḥne al-Foqa (1755.1760) can be eliminated as a possibility since it is not “opposite” Shechem. The second possibility is that Michmethath might refer to the mountain range of Jebel el-Kabir (1812.1833), northeast of Shechem, or the Valley of Wadi Bedan (179.181), a tributary of Wadi Far’a descending northwards to the east of Shechem, with both geographical features probably already situated within

the territory of Manasseh. Therefore, the Jebel et-Tuwanik (1842.1749), together with the nearby crest of Karm el-Bēše, more closely resembles the biblical description. According to Eusebius, Michmethath belongs to the tribe of Manasseh and is transcribed as Μαχθαθ (Eusebius, *Onom.* 130:16), whereas LXX has several different variants.

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