Mearah

Though generally a proper noun designating a hiding place (*mē'ārād* “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 *mgr*, although the spelling to be expected would be *mgṛr*, 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: Mugar Jezzin, a complex of caves at the top of the Lebanon Range east of Sidon, or el-Mugēriye 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 'ārd. This place might also be identified with 'Aruna mentioned in Egyptian texts (Thutmose III; Shoshenq). If read as 'ārd, the site at Hîrbet '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 Γαζάς) rendering the Hebrew me'azzūd. 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, me'ārim (“from the cities [of the Sidonians]”) or a scribal error (‘r for correct šr = “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.


Erasmus Gaß