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Edward Robinson - A Man Prepared, Persistent, and Productive

"Bible Lands Archaeology" saw a considerable shift around the end of the 19th century and on into the 20th. This new trend, a swing from unearthing huge spectacular objects from major ruins of the empires of Mesopotamia and Egypt to comparatively miniscule sites in the Holy Land itself, meant a jump from macrocosm to microcosm, monuments to potsherds. Locating layered remains on the hills ("tels") of Palestine became the primary goal.

But in the early 19th century Palestine confronted eager visitors with a bewildering tumble of rockstrewn hills and valleys, peppered with abandoned or resettled sites from ancient times. Adding to the confusion, traditional claims as to what was where in Bible times were proffered curious (often gullible) pilgrims visiting the Holy land. *Correct* identification of locations is a prerequisite of successful Biblical archaeology. This makes our present story very important.

The "devout skeptic," American *Edward* Robinson, stepped in to attempt a clarification of the picture. Very unlike youthful pioneers Rawlinson or Layard, Robinson's active duty in the Near East was delayed into his middle age. Forty-four, to be exact. By then he was *ready* and well-prepared. Expert in classical Greek, he later mastered Hebrew, studying in Germany with the master lexicographer-grammarian, Heinrich F. W. Gesenius. A published translator and writer himself, Robinson's involvement

with the Biblical text spawned determination to untangle the topographical mess described above.

When Edward Robinson accepted a call to teach at Union Seminary, New York City, it was with the proviso that he be given leave *first* to spend considerable time traveling in the Near East and writing up his discoveries. The initial foray, in 1838, consumed 105 days, extending from Cairo to Beirut - by way of the Sinai, Arabia Petrea, then Jerusalem, Nazareth, Safed, Tyre and Sidon. Robinson credited his Arabic-speaking missionary companion, Eli Smith, with the success of the exploration. But he himself produced the still classic three volume report, published in 1841. *Biblical Researches in Palestine* placed Bible geography on a more scientific footing.

Robinson's linguistic acumen enabled him to spot some now obvious preservations of ancient place names. 'Anata, for Biblical Anathoth; *Rammun* for ancient Rimmon; *Mukhmas* for ancient Michmash, etc. This isn't foolproof, however. The modern Arab town ...

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