

MORE EVIDENCE OF CHATEAUBRIAND'S ACCURACY IN "L'ITINÉRAIRE DE PARIS A JÉRUSALEM"

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In "L'itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem" Chateaubriand points out a geographical characteristic which he had observed along the coast near Jaffa.

"At Jaffa fresh water is found all along the shore. Going towards Gaza you have only to make a hollow in the sand with your hand to make fresh water ooze up, even at the water's edge. I myself have made this curious experiment, from the southern edge of the town as far as a hermit's hut on the shore which can be seen from some distance".

I thought that this "curious experiment" would be borne out by the French Sailing Directions which aim to supply mariners with all necessary information on the coasts they are likely to frequent. The existence of fresh water places close to the sea is carefully noted, since in bygone days ships were often obliged to make very long crossings and fresh water was therefore strictly rationed. In the French Navy these places are given a special name — *aiguade* (watering place).

However I have not been able to find any mention of an *aiguade* either on the charts or the Sailing Directions for the coasts of Syria. Before concluding that Chateaubriand had allowed his imagination to run riot, as his detractors have so often suggested, I thought it advisable to ask the opinion of the meteorological and oceanographic experts of the State of Israel. I therefore wrote to Mr. MANÉ, Director of Israel's Meteorological Office, who forwarded my letter to Mr. JACOBS, Director of the Hydrological Office, and he has sent me the following reply.

Jerusalem, 27 February 1966.

"The phenomenon described by Chateaubriand in "L'itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem" is well known and can be noted all along the Israeli coast.

"The underground waters of Israel's coastal plain are augmented by rains falling in this region, and in general these waters flow out towards the west, emptying themselves into the Mediterranean. The amount of water has been reduced in the course of years by the pumping of this fresh water into wells, but at the present time a certain flow of subterranean

water towards the west however still exists. Today we are still able to verify the phenomenon described by Chateaubriand.

“ Wells drilled on the foreshore could accordingly produce fresh water, and even wells drilled in the sea close to the coast should be able to provide fresh water... ”.

Yet once more a little research into a very specific technical point has provided proof of the accuracy of Chateaubriand's narrative.