

THE EIGHTH EXCAVATION CAMPAIGN AT BETH SHEA'RIM, 1956

by B. Mazar

The eighth campaign of excavation was carried on in three areas:

(a) In the NW corner of the town an area of one dunum was cleared in its entirety. It consists of a complex, 40×15 m., containing a paved court with several cisterns (one of them vaulted over), an ante-room (later on included in the main building), and a basilica divided into a nave and two aisles by two rows of five pillars with corinthian capitals. At the end of the basilica, opposite the entrance, was a small tribunal bamah. The building was constructed of drafted ashlar and paved with coloured mosaics; it had plastered and painted walls, with marble slabs (some with reliefs) set into them. In the cistern of the court were found numerous pottery fragments, bronze and iron vessels, hundreds of coins and a fragment inscribed in Greek. It is suggested that this building might have been a Beth-din (Rabbinical Court) dating from the end of the second or the beginning of the third century.

A number of potsherds from the 8th century B.C., i.e. from the time of the Israelite monarchy, was found on the rock face; this puts the origin of settlement at Beth She'arim back six centuries earlier than previously assumed. The IA sherds were followed in chronological order by Persian and Hellenistic pottery, Hellenistic jar-stamps and Ptolemaic coins.

(b) In the necropolis work continued on the Cave of the Sarcophagi (catacomb No. 20); the number of coffins already cleared now amounts to over 200. Systematic clearance brought to light the remains of a road or ramp leading up to the city, as well as six new catacombs, of which three are of special interest:

No. 24 had attached to it a square mausoleum and a round building perhaps a tholos: it was connected with a large cistern which has only partly been cleared. In the 4th century it served as a store-room for objects placed in the tombs; finds here include much glass and pottery and hundreds of lamps, which can be dated by their types and by the discovery of seven Constantinian coins. In No. 25 several Greek and three Hebrew inscriptions were found; the latter included the epitaph of "Isaac Zeira son of Simeon" and a complete alphabet. — No. 26 had an unusually fine entrance made of basalt stone; it contained three halls. The tomb originally contained the tomb of one Miriam, daughter of Rabbi Judah of Susiana; in later years was apparently taken over by a Sidonian family, the head of which once served as archisynagogus. One hall of this catacomb contained numerous reliefs of seven-branched candlesticks.

(c) At the neighbouring site of Alonim cleared a tomb was cleared consisting of an entrance with steps, a well plastered court and two halls (one of which was found ruined) closed with a rolling stone. The tomb contained ossuaries, coffins, wall ornaments and pottery. This tomb can be dated to the middle of the second century, i.e. it is earlier than the Beth She'arim necropolis. It may possibly be connected with the neighbouring site of Ardasqus, the residence of R. Meir, which preceded Beth She'arim as a seat of learning.

AN ANCIENT ARABIC INSCRIPTION FROM BETH SHE'ARIM

by U. Ben-Horin

An Arabic inscription dated 287 A.H./900 A.D. was found by Prof. B. Mazar on a wall of the catacomb known as Maghārat al-Jahannum, during the last season of excavations at Beth She'arim. The inscription has 11 lines; the script is cursive, similar to that of Arabic papyri of the 9th century A.D. The inscription was written by an Arab visitor to the tombs, and contains eight lines of a dirge, the three other lines consisting of the signature of the writer, an explanatory remark, and the date. The dirge is composed in the form of an acrostic. A full English translation and commentary to the inscription is published in *I.E.J.* 7, 1957, pp. 163-167.

THE SECOND EXCAVATION SEASON AT HAZOR, 1956

by Y. Yadin

(See *IEJ*, 7, 1957, pp. 118-123).

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE YAVNEH REGION

by J. Kaplan

The area examined extends between Yavneh, Qubeibeh and et Maghar. The finds on the various sites were: *Nabi Arafat* and *Kh. Fatunah*—Rom.-Byz. pottery; *Ben Zakkay* village—Chalc.; *Yavneh*: IA IIa (near Maqam Abu Hureira), Pers.-Hell. (near Maqam esh Sheikh Selim), RB (to East and West of Abu Hureira); *Kh. Duheisha*—MB I-II, R and A tombs and remains; to N. of the site—Arab-Mameluke, to East—MB II, RB; *Tell esh-shallāf*—MB II tomb; LB on hill; IA II a, IA Ib-c on hill-top; Pers.-Hell. to North-West. The historical and geographical implications of these finds are discussed by the author and the following identifications proposed: Tell el Ful—Yirtha (Thutmosis III list, No. 100), Umm Kalkhah—Harkal (ib. No. 101), Qatra-Shikronah; el Maghar—Har Ba'alah (Jos. xix, 44), Kh. Habrah—Kefar Hebronah, Kh. Duheisha—Yaqubel (Thut. No. 102).

KHIRBET EL-MUQANNA' — 'EQRON

by J. Naveh (Levy)

After a systematic archaeological survey, it was found that this site is larger than shown by the previous surveys carried out by Prof. Albright and others. The low mound of Kh. el-Muqanna' contains the remains of the largest Iron Age city known in Palestine, covering ca. 160 dunams. In addition to traces of a great part of the city-wall, many structural remains were found still visible on the surface, including the southern city-gate with its two towers and a long (80 m) building with pillars. The pottery finds belong almost entirely to the Iron Age (I-III). Sherds with typical Philistine decoration are relatively very common on the site. Taking account of the archaeological data, the literary sources and the geographical situation of the site, the writer proposes to identify Kh. el-Muqanna' with Biblical 'Eqron.

A JEWISH TOMB ON THE WESTERN SLOPE OF SHAHIN HILL, JERUSALEM

by L. Y. Rahmani

The small tomb published here consists of a sunken court, with a small, rockhewn bench inside the entrance, and two chambers. The first of these proved to be the actual burial chamber, and the second a "bone-chamber" or communal ossuary. Pottery found in the latter indicated that it was in use in Hasmonaeen times only, while the actual burial chamber continued in use up to the destruction of the Second Temple. At this latter period reburial in individual ossuaries took place. For storage of these ossuaries one loculus in the burial chamber was deepened and enlarged, thus avoiding the re-use of the former "bone-chamber" for this purpose.

REMNANTS OF THE ROMAN ROAD NEAR THE MEVO-BEITAR HIGHWAY

by Z. Kallai-Kleinmann

Near the highway connecting Beth Nathif with Mevo-Beitar and Solomon's Pools, (1-100,000 map, sheet 9, co-ord. 1530 1240—1535 1241), a series of rock-cut steps was found. These are most probably the remnants of the Roman road from Jerusalem to Gaza. The edge of each step is raised so that it actually forms a sunken oblong. It is suggested that these steps were cut so as to hold gravel. It could serve as the basis for the paved road wherever it had to pass a rocky stretch, dangerous for traffic in its natural state.

A HIEROGLYPHIC INSCRIPTION FROM QUBEIBEH

by J. Leibovitch

The inscription published here was found by Mr. J. Kaplan at Qubeibeh in the neighbourhood of Khirbet Duheisheh (or Kh. el-'Ajjuri). It seems to belong to the inscription published by Alan Rowe in his *Catalogue of Egyptian Scarabs* (1936) pl. XXXVI. It reads: "(end of cartouche)... living eternally, for ever..." while our inscription reads: "... (name of a god) [king of the gods], Seth..." The words "king of the gods" are missing but are the obvious supplement.

The date of the inscription may range from the XIIth Dynasty to the end of the Middle Kingdom. The author would date it to the end of the Middle Kingdom (the Hyksos periods) as it would thus better suit the historical background.

STREAM PIRACY IN ISRAEL

by M. Harel

Close scrutiny of the map of Palestine shows a number of anomalous stream patterns. Some of them seem to indicate definite cases of piracy. In all cases it is the drainage basin of the Jordan which captured valleys the original direction of which was oriented towards the Mediterranean. This appears peculiar at first sight as the Jordan basin has an arid climate with rainfall amounts much smaller than those of the western slope draining to the Mediterranean. An analysis of gradients shows that it is the much steeper gradients of the eastern drainage which outweigh the higher rainfall of the western drainage basin.

The same relation holds good in the arid Negev where the runoff factor is higher than in the more humid north. This is due to the occurrence of semi-permeable strata and crusts which prevent absorption of rainfall by the rocks.

REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE SOCIETY

This report includes a preliminary notice on the Eleventh Archaeological Convention held at Haifa; reports on the excavations, publications and the activities of the branches of the Society; also the financial reports for 1954-5 and 1955-6, as submitted to the General Assembly held at Haifa.