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THE EXCAVATIONS AT TELL BEIT MIRSIM I.

By Director W. F. Albright

In Bulletin No. 18, Dr. Fisher presented a plan for coördination of the American archaeological work in Palestine. While it is unfortunately not yet possible to realize this important project in its entirety, for lack of funds, a beginning is being made this year along modest lines. For the present we must be contented with joint undertakings of the type proposed in Bulletin No. 14, p. 12, where the funds for digging and part of the equipment are provided by the coöperating institution, while the School furnishes the scientific direction and part of the equipment, besides placing its other resources at the disposal of the expedition. In this way it becomes possible for small excavations to be made with a modest outlay of funds. The scientific results of such work are often very large, when compared to the expenditures.

The first two excavations of this type are being made this year, both under the general supervision of Dr. Fisher, the Professor of Archæology in the Schools. At Tell en-Naṣbeh, an important site about seven miles north of Jerusalem Dean W. F. Badé of the Pacific School of Religion is carrying on a very successful campaign, which will be duly described by him. At Tell Beit Mirsim the joint expedition of Xenia Theological Seminary and the American School, under the direction of President M. G. Kyle and the present writer, began work April 1st, as previously planned. The plan of coöperation followed is essentially the same as that which proved so fortunate in the joint expedition of 1924 to the Dead Sea valley, described in Bulletin No. 14.
The site of Tell Beit Mirsim was studied in the spring of 1924 (see Bulletin No. 15), and so impressed the writer that he proposed its identification with Kirjath-sepher, one of the most important towns of southern Judah and one of the Canaanite royal cities conquered by Joshua. Owing to the fact that the name seems to mean "Book-city," it has been suggested, notably by Professor Sayce, that there was a library of cuneiform tablets here. However this may be, the suggestion is interesting, and serves deconsideration. Happily, the description of the site so interested President Kyle of Xenia that he offered to provide the funds for a joint excavation of the mound. All necessary formalities, negotiations and preparations were brought to a speedy conclusion, largely owing to the valuable assistance of Mr. Bailey, Governor of the Hebron District.

Tell Beit Mirsim is situated thirteen miles in a straight line southwest of Hebron, and six hours from it by horse or camel. It belongs to the people of Dūra, the biblical Adoraim, Adora of the Maccabean Age. These folk have been notorious until very lately for their turbulence and brigandage, but like most other ex-bandits they are very decent when one becomes better acquainted with them. It must be confessed that their present humility is largely, perhaps, due to the severe punishment meted out to them by the Government after the pitched battle between Dūra and Dāheriyeh three years ago, in which some thirteen were killed and over a score badly wounded. It is said by officials that this outburst of playfulness cost the men of Dūra, directly and indirectly, not less than twenty thousand Egyptian pounds, or $100,000—rather a large sum for a Palestinian peasant community of six thousand souls.

From April 1st to 18th, after which our work was interrupted for a week by the Archaeological Congress in Jerusalem, we pushed work vigorously, with a maximum force of seventy laborers. We cleared nearly the whole line of the Jewish wall, and uncovered the Canaanite revetment down to the virgin rock in several places. We also cleared the whole of the east gate, reaching the virgin rock in a number of places, and sinking a shaft two metres square just inside the gate in order to obtain the stratification at this point. The results agree exactly with those obtained at the gate itself and elsewhere on the mound. During the last two days we employed about half our force in clearing the highest stratum of the "high-place" in the northwestern sector.

Nowhere in Palestine has the writer seen such ideal conditions for precise stratigraphical results. The site is free from encumbrance, and exhibits three very strongly marked burned levels, belonging to three complete destructions of the city by fire. Thanks to the careful study of the pottery from the successive strata and sub-strata, it is possible to describe the history of the town already, though names and personalities naturally elude us as yet, owing to the fact that no inscriptions have been found. Since, however, there are at least a hundred thousand cubic metres of débris on the site, we need not be discouraged by the meagerness of our epigraphic finds during three weeks of work.

Our site seems to have been organized as a town toward the end of the third millennium, perhaps not until about 2000 B.C. After a comparatively brief occupation, as indicated by the average depth of about half
a metre in this stratum, the town was destroyed by fire at some time in the latter part of the Middle Bronze Age. The site was soon reoccupied by a population accustomed to building strong fortifications. The revetment of the Canaanite wall of the second period was probably about seven metres high, and its polygonal construction is strikingly reminiscent of the glacis of the Middle Bronze wall of the fourth city at Jericho. The east gate was then situated in a great tower surrounded on the outside by a massive sloping revetment. We may date this construction about the seventeenth century B.C., as at Jericho, while the previous destruction took place at the same time, in all probability, as that of the third city of Jericho, about the eighteenth century B.C.

The Late Bronze stratum on our site averages about two metres thick, and at the east gate exhibits two successive building phases, apparently separated by an incomplete destruction of the gate. Until the work is further advanced we cannot even suggest a date for this event.

The Late Bronze pottery on our site is characteristic, with intrusive Cypro-Phoenician ware (wishbone-handled bowls, base-ring ware, etc.). The masonry of this period seems markedly superior to that of the following one—quite natural when one remembers the difference between a Canaanite "royal" city and a provincial Jewish town.

The second catastrophe which overwhelmed the city came during the transition from Late Bronze to Early Iron, i.e., in the thirteenth or twelfth centuries B.C. Since this is precisely the age of the Israelite irruption (cir. 1225 B.C.), we need have no hesitation in combining the two events. The town which arose from the ruins was approximately the same in extent as the preceding Canaanite City, but was not so well built. The Israelite wall was only about two metres wide, on the average, while the glacis was formed by a series of rounded bastions built of much smaller stones than were used by the Canaanites. The masonry of the
gate, though using some of the large blocks—one over two metres long—of the older fortress, is relatively inferior in every respect. The gateway itself is, however, very interesting, and exhibits the same indirect ingress as that still familiar to tourists who pass through the Turkish gates of Jerusalem.

After a period of peace, Tell Beit Mirsim was attacked by some enemy, who partly destroyed the gate, and broke down the wall just north of it. The breach was never repaired, and we do not yet know where the new wall was built. The approximate date of this occurrence is fixed by the fact that the new constructions at the gate are built with their foundations a metre higher than the old ones of the Iron Age, and that this metre of débris contains little, if any, pottery from the second phase of the Early Iron, while the pottery above this stratum is almost exclusively from the latter phase. We must, therefore, date the partial destruction in the Early Iron between the early tenth and the early ninth century B.C. There is no trace of fire, so the conqueror was possibly satisfied with the capture of the place. We are reminded of the fact that Shishak, king of Egypt, "took the fortified towns of Judah" (II Chr. 12:4), as confirmed by the famous Shishak list at Karnak, in the fifth year of Rehoboam, that is, about 923 B.C.* The discovery at Megiddo of a fragment of a stela of Shishak, recently announced by Professor Breasted, shows that some of us have been too sceptical with respect to the Shishak list, and that the towns mentioned in it were really captured by this Pharaoh.

In the second phase of the Early Iron there was a partial restoration or rather reconstruction of the gate, and a reservoir was installed just to the north of the main entrance. The reservoir was fed by an aqueduct

formed by large stones hollowed out in the middle and laid side by side so as to form a continuous channel or water pipe. The stones are shapeless, in contrast to the perfectly hewn blocks of similar installations in the Roman age.

The "high-place" just now being examined can hardly be described until it has been studied in more detail. It is already possible to state that it was in use down to the final destruction of the city by the Chaldeans, and also that it had been destroyed and set up again at least once. Highly interesting finds may be expected from the continuance of our excavations at this point.

The final destruction by fire in the latter part of the second phase of the Early Iron may confidently be connected with the Chaldean conquest of Judah in 588–7 B.C. There was no occupation thereafter, aside from a few unimportant installations, which may safely be postulated from the Byzantine sherds scattered sparsely over the surface, but never found below ground. As will be seen, we have an extraordinary opportunity here for highly interesting discoveries, and best of all to the archaeologist, excellent conditions for the study of pottery, since the strata are horizontal and exceptionally well defined.

The identification with Debir or Kirjath-sepher now seems to the writer practically certain, since the archaeological evidence is just as favorable as the literary and topographical material. In the sixth district of Judah (Jos. 15:48–51), to which Kirjath-sepher belonged, there are only two mounds which can come into consideration, Tell Beit Mirsim and Tell el-Khuweilifeh. As will be shown later, from a variety of considerations, the former is by far the better site of the two. This is not the place to go into details, since at least fifty pages would be required for a satisfactory discussion of the evidence, which is much fuller than might be thought at first. We may note, as a matter of special interest, that Dr. Kyle has happily connected the mysterious gullôth of Jud. 1:15 with the very ancient wells of ground water in this region, where wells replace springs entirely. That the word has this meaning appears to the writer certain, for reasons which cannot well be presented here.

With the excavations now in progress at Megiddo, Beth-shan, Shechem, Shiloh, Tell en-Naṣbeh and Tell Beit Mirsim, we may confidently expect fresh light on biblical Palestine. Palestinian archaeology is only in its infancy, and the outlook has never been so attractive as today. Students of the Bible and of oriental archaeology can do no better than follow its development with the closest attention, for it holds the secret of the correct understanding of both.

Jerusalem, April 25, 1926.
THE EXCAVATIONS AT TELL BEIT MIRSIM II.

After the Archæological Congress, work was resumed at our site, and was pushed vigorously for five more weeks, with a maximum force of ninety laborers. The results attained in the first three weeks, as described in my previous report, were confirmed and extended, so that the archæological history of the site is now clear, though later excavation will doubtless fill in details. The East and West Gates were completely cleared, and the examination of the fortifications greatly extended. In addition to this, extensive areas of the uppermost stratum near the two gates were cleared, and a large grotto just north of the East Gate was studied, and cleared in part. In order to secure a still more adequate series of potsherds from all periods of the town's history, we dug a second shaft, four meters square, near the first one, just inside the East Gate.

Tell Beit Mirsim from the Northeast.

From the work of the last month, it becomes certain that, in addition to the three complete destructions already discovered, there were two other partial destructions by fire, both accompanied by dismantling of the fortifications. In all, then, the city was captured and destroyed, at least in large part, five times, giving us five clearly defined strata of occupation, which we shall interpret historically below.

Small finds were few until work began inside the walls, and house ruins began to be cleared. In all about two hundred objects were catalogued, nearly all clay vessels of the Early Iron II, though a few broken vases of the Middle and Late Bronze and the Early Iron I were found in the lower strata of the East Gate, as well as in the adjacent grotto. Three fragments of Astarte figurines, one head and two busts, came to light in the débris of the Early Iron II (later monarchy of Judah). Among other objects may be mentioned a baby's rattle, a carved kohl mortar of lava, etc. Of particular interest is a well preserved series of weights, all found
in the tower north of the West Gate, and hence probably official. Though
none are inscribed, they conform very closely to the official standard of
the pre-exilic Jewish weights hitherto discovered. The most important one
is an eight mina weight of polished limestone, in a perfect state of preserva-
tion, and hence valuable for the fixation of the standard, since none
of the standard weights belonging to this period so far found are so large.

Owing to the extraordinarily clear demarcation of strata, superior to
that of any other important site so far excavated in Palestine, it will be
possible to secure a much more exact ceramic classification than has
hitherto been possible. For this reason alone the excavations ought to
be continued for several campaigns at least. Of all sites in Judæa studied
so far, Tell Beît Mirsim is the best calculated to give an adequate picture
of the civilization of a true Jewish town of the period of the Divided

The Excavation in Progress North of the East Gate.

Monarchy, since it is more remote from the Philistine Plain than the tells
of the Shephelah, and is accordingly less likely to have been influenced
from non-Jewish sources.

The identification with Kirjath-sepher has become increasingly prob-
able; the present writer regards it as almost certain. Without going into
detail, we may mention briefly the principal arguments. 1. Joshua XV
furnishes us with a list of the twelve districts of Judah, arranged geo-
graphically, as first pointed out last year by Professor Alt, Director of
the German School of Archaeology in Jerusalem. Studying this list in
the light of his own topographical researches in Judah, the writer found
that the geographical order is surprisingly accurate, and that the districts
may be sharply delimited. Kirjath-sepher was the chief town of the
sixth district, which occupied the southwestern projection of the central
ridge, and was bounded on the south by the Negeb of Simeon, and on the
ridge, and was bounded on the south by the Negeb of Simeon, and on
the north and west by the southern Shephelah. After studying all the
important sites in and near this district, the writer has found that only two can possibly come into consideration: Tell Beit Mirsim and Tell el-Khuweilfeh five miles south of it. The latter belongs, however, to the territory of Simeon, and thus drops out; a number of further arguments may be adduced against the identification with Kirjath-sepher, not the least of which is the probability that Tell el-Khuweilfeh is the ancient Sharuhen, or Shilhím, which resisted the arms of Amasis I for three years (cir. 1570 B.C.). 2. The situation of Tell Beit Mirsim agrees with the references in Joshua, suit the account of the southern campaign remarkably well, and satisfying the requirements of the story of Caleb and Achsah. According to this story, Kirjath-sepher was on the edge of the Negeb, in the neighborhood of wells (*gullôth*), but without an adequate water supply itself. President Kyle happily identified the *gullôth* with the wells of ground water, or rather, shafts giving access to underground streams or springs, which are found in this region. In the immediate vicinity of Tell Beit Mirsim there have been none since the beginning of the Early Iron, at the latest, but there are excellent wells a mile below and two miles above the tell, and in view of their undoubted antiquity we may provisionally identify them with the “upper and lower *gullôth,*” as already done by Dr. Kyle. Another argument may be deduced from the fact that Debir (Kirjath-sepher) was connected by tradition with Anab and Hebron, all called “cities of the Anakim” because of the remains of massive walls of unhewn blocks of stone (Cyclopaean masonry), found there. 3. Last, but not least, is the perfect concordance between the his-
tory of the place as we know it from the literary sources and the archaeological data found in the excavations. This agreement will appear as we sketch the archaeological history of the place in the following paragraphs.

So far no clear traces of masonry belonging to the Early Bronze period, toward the close of which the site was first occupied, have been found. Yet to judge from the deposit of half a meter of débris, full of potsherds and ashes, there was an occupation which must have lasted at least two or three hundred years. It seems likely that this first settlement at the end of the third millennium was composed of wooden huts, surrounded by a palisade of tree trunks and earth. In those days there was an abundance of timber in the hill-country, though of an inferior quality. The first town was, in any case, poor enough when compared to the hoary cities of Gaza, Megiddo, Jericho, Beth-erah, etc., which already stood on their tells at the time when Kirjath-sepher was founded. In general, however, the towns in the central hill country were founded much later than the cities of the river valleys and alluvial plains. The first town was destroyed by a great conflagration some time about the middle of the Middle Bronze Age, and a strongly fortified city was built on the site almost immediately afterwards, to judge from the fact that its foundations were laid in the bed of ashes marking the division between the first and second strata of occupation.

As seen in the first report, there is a striking similarity between the fortifications of the second town of Tell Beit Marris and those of Jericho IV, which are certainly to be dated about 1700 B.C., as now recognized also by the excavators, Professors Sellin and Watzinger. It is becoming more and more evident, as a result of a comparison of the data from different sites in Palestine, that there was a great barbarian irruption from the north during the eighteenth century B.C., in the course of which many of the cities of Palestine were destroyed. This invasion must be connected with the movements which ultimately brought the Hyksos into Egypt. The extraordinary strength of the fortifications erected by the new conquerors is to be explained by the feudal organization of the Hyksos Empire in Asia, independently recognized by Professor Alt and the writer. The strongly fortified “cities” of this period are properly the castles of the local chiefs, who belonged to many different races. Their true designation was awilu, a Babylonian word meaning “noble,” but they arrogated to themselves the title “king” whenever the weakness of the central authority promised impunity.

The city wall of the second city varies greatly in its construction, depending upon the degree of security afforded by the situation. On the northern side, where the hill rises high above the surrounding valleys, the wall was relatively weak—probably not more than three meters thick, on the average, though built of massive stones—and the revetment, which seems to have disappeared, cannot have been very strong. Near the West Gate the slope of the hill is slight, and a wall four and a half meters thick, with an exterior revetment about seven meters high, was built. On the southwest, where the hill is connected with another more extensive one by a narrow neck, where our camp was pitched, a dry moat was cut across the neck, defended by a wall and revetment which must have
averaged ten meters in height. The strength of the revetment here was in fact so great that the interior wall was reduced to a mere retaining wall, about a meter and a half thick. At the East Gate the revetment was about seven meters high, but we did not cut through it to examine the wall proper. North of the East Gate the revetment has disappeared entirely, but since the interior wall was here only about a meter and a half thick, the revetment must have been very strong.

Only at the East Gate are we in a position as yet to study the architecture of the second stratum. The superiority of the constructions of the Bronze Age to those of the Early Iron Age is very great, and shows clearly enough how much more importance was attached to defence by the inhabitants of the former age, when the place was a “Canaanite royal city,” whereas it sank later to the position of a minor provincial town. Aside from characteristic Middle and Late Bronze pottery, no minor finds dating from the second period have yet been made.

Early in the history of the second period, to judge from the pottery evidence, there was a partial destruction of the town, accompanied by a conflagration at the East Gate, the interior of which had to be completely rebuilt. We may safely date this destruction in the sixteenth century B.C. In view of the fact that Sharuhen, only five miles south, was captured, and probably destroyed by Amosis I about 1570 B.C., since it does not reappear in history until the Early Iron Age, it is likely that Kirjath-
sephera met with the same fate. At all events, the destruction was only partial, and the town speedily arose from its ruins, and became more important than before, from all indications. From about 1500 to 1200 B.C. flourished the third town, which we may call II B. A large fragment of diorite, found in the débris of the Early Iron Age, and still bearing traces of carving, may represent an Egyptian monument of this age. Further excavations will doubtless bring to light Egyptian statues and stelæ, as well as cuneiform tablets. Among the minor finds recalling the Egyptian domination were several sherds of Egyptian faience, found under the burned level separating the Bronze from the Early Iron Age, at the West Gate.

The picture drawn of the third period, that of the Israelite occupation, in the first report, requires no modification. In the grotto by the East Gate were found quantities of potsherds, and some nearly complete vases, dating from Early Iron I (period of the Judges and the United Monarchy). Among them were sherds of Philistine craters, one exhibiting a complete frieze, composed of the usual series of swans pluming themselves, but very poorly executed, and perhaps a local imitation. At the West Gate it was found that there had been a complete destruction by fire, at the same time as the partial destruction of the East Gate, mentioned in the first report. The ascription of this destruction to Shishak now seems practically certain, thanks to the new ceramic and other evidence.
The East and West Gates of the Jewish period are well preserved, and represent the only city gates of this period which can be fully studied. They have both been left exposed, so that students may examine them at their leisure. While they cannot be compared to the great Canaanite city gates of Shechem, they are unique as examples of the Israelite period. The East Gate is much wider, and must have been intended for chariots, especially since it connects with a pre-Roman road which may be traced for some distance to the southeast, though with numerous interruptions. The West Gate is too narrow for chariots, and was thus intended only for pedestrians, or for laden asses; it exhibits the same indirect ingress as the East Gate, though otherwise very differently planned.

The Bronze Age Revetment at the Southern End of the Tell.

The first campaign at Tell Beit Mirsim may thus be considered as a great success, especially in view of the modest outlay—less than $3000 with everything counted. Our success is largely due to Dr. Kyle, who not only furnished most of the funds, but also remained on the scene of excavations for nearly the whole time, though not very well in health. His fine spirit should find imitators. We also enjoyed the assistance of Professor J. L. Kelso of Xenia, as well as of two former students of this seminary, the Revs. Lee and Webster, now of Omaha. All these gentlemen deserve the greatest credit for the whole-souled way in which they plunged into the novel and often very exhausting work of bossing gangs of workmen, assembling pottery, surveying the site, and planning the
ruins. Though camp life under the circumstances was sometimes very trying, with dust and heat, fleas, earwigs and scorpions, no one complained, but all took discomforts in good part. Our work was only once seriously interfered with, when a terrific wind and dust storm forced us to suspend work for a day and employ our entire force in saving the tents, which were badly damaged, but could be taken down in time to escape destruction.

Relations with the natives were excellent; two strikes were attempted, but proved quite abortive. We were constantly receiving invitations to dine out, many of which we accepted. These occasions were welcomed by the writer as providing an opportunity to record the local traditions about the origin and history of modern Dura, which was occupied by the ancestors of the present inhabitants about 1600 A.D. The saga of Dura offers extraordinarily interesting parallels to the traditions of the Old Testament, but has not hitherto been known to Western scholars.

After it was found possible to reach our site by car from the Beersheba road, we had numerous visitors, including most of the scholars then in Palestine. We also enjoyed longer visits from Professors Wishart and Dougherty, as well as from Professor Böhl, the eminent Old Testament scholar of Groningen, who is collaborating with Professor Sellin in the excavation of ancient Shechem, which has yielded such brilliant results this summer.

Let us hope that the excavation of Tell Beit Mirsim can be continued in the spring of 1928. That the results will be important no one can doubt after the first campaign. Donations of large or small amounts will be appreciated, and may be sent either to President M. G. Kyle, Xenia Theological Seminary, St. Louis, or to the officers of the School in Jerusalem.

PARIS, September 21, 1926.