

## EXCAVATION AT TELL ES-SA'IDIYEH (PRELIMINARY REPORT)

The first season of excavations at Tell es-Sa'idiyeh (map reference: 20461861) by the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania began on January 1 and ended February 29, 1964. The work was under the direction of the writer, assisted by the following staff: John E. Huesman, S.J., Asia G. Halaby, Gustav A. Materna, Jacques Lagarce, Thomas L. McClellan, Terry Ball, Moawiyah M. Ibrahim, Hassan Mamlouk, Ahmed Shishtawi, Khair Nimer Yassin, and Robert Smith, who was present for a portion of the season. Dr. Awni Dajani, Director of the Department of Antiquities, graciously assigned three members of the Department, in addition to its representative Moawiyah M. Ibrahim, to the staff and helped in getting quarters for the staff at the Cooperative Camp at Wadi el-Yabis.

The tell covers an area of about 75 dunums (= 25 acres) and stands at a height of 42 m. above the plain of the Ghor. The tell rises in two steps from the plain to the west: first there is a bench, about 14 m. high, which covers about one-third of the total area of ancient occupation; the tell proper occupies the eastern two-thirds of the site and is 28 m. higher than the bench. The ancient name of the site not certain. Both Abel and Albright identify it with the biblical Zaphon (also mentioned in the Tell el-Amarna letters), but Glueck has more recently argued for an identification with Zarethan, mentioned in I Kings 7:46 as the locale for the casting of the bronze vessels for the temple of Solomon. The discovery of a number of bronze vessels this season lends some support to the identification that Glueck made on historical grounds alone.

The objective of the first season was exploratory and work was carried on in three representative areas:

- (1) the north west sector of the tell,
- (2) the north side of the tell in line with the spring beside the Wadi Kefranje, and
- (3) a sounding at the north side of the bench.

The number of laborers employed averaged 130 daily throughout the season.

### Excavation at the NW of the Tell

At the north west of the tell 30 five-meter plots were opened (23-C/G-3/8) and excavated to a depth of approximately 1.50 m. The uppermost layer, Floor 1, had been almost completely eroded; only a few isolated brick walls and about 21 circular grain pits remained of this occupation, which could not have been much later than the 8th century B. C. The latest system of fortification at the site was a casemate wall of mud brick set on a foundation of rounded stones from the wadi. Much of the foundation remains on the north side of the tell and was traced this season for a distance of over a hundred meters. The exact relationship of this casemate wall to the occupation levels on the mound has not yet been determined because of the heavy erosion at the northwest of the tell where the excavations were made. However, it is fairly clear that the casemate wall must have been used only in the Iron II period of occupation.

The earlier layer of occupation, Floor 2, discovered this season was unusually well preserved thanks to a violent destruction. The floor was covered everywhere with a deposit of ash, charred roof beams and fragments of mud impressed with reeds that provided the support for the mud of the roof. It is possible that this destruction was that of Sheshonk, whose itinerary preserved on the pylon at Karnak seems to have included this area of the Ghor. This identification will have to wait further study of the pottery found on the floors of the houses. Floor 2 seems, however, to belong to the very earliest phases of Iron II and could be placed at the end of the 10th century, when Sheshonk made his famous raid on Palestine.

The city of Floor 2 seems to have been the result of definite city planning. A long street, paved with small stones, runs north and south. To the east of this street are three large houses of almost identical design. The roof of each was supported by columns and two of the houses had a second room to the east of the columned room. The most interesting of the houses was that in 23-D/E-5, which had obviously been used for some specialized purpose. Highly inflammable material stored in it at the time of the destruction burned the roof and the walls to a brick-red color. In one corner there were found 72 loom weights, some of them lying in a fairly straight line, as though they had been attached to a weaving beam. Between the four columns of the house were plastered bins. A tentative suggestion is that this was the site of a weaving industry.

To the west of the street there appeared a number of ovens for baking bread and for general cooking. These installations had been enclosed by walls but as yet it is not clear as to how much of the area was roofed. In addition to the loom weights there were recovered such objects of daily life as fibulae, cosmetic palettes, bowls, pilgrim flasks, cooking pots, figurines, spindle whirles, etc.

At the north of this area of the excavation a trial trench was cut to about 4 m. below the line of the outer shell of the casemate wall. In the trench there was found a sequence of Iron II, Iron I, and Late Bronze sherds, laid in layers along horizontal lines. The absence of any sloping tip lines in this area outside the latest city wall indicates that in the Iron I and Late Bronze periods the city wall lay outside the line of the casemate wall. Thus it is apparent that in the Iron II period of occupation the city was constructed to an area smaller than that of the earlier cities. At the bottom of the trial trench there were found Early Bronze Age sherds. Obviously in the Early Bronze Age the city occupied both the tell and the bench, where Early Bronze sherds lie everywhere on the surface. As yet there is no evidence for occupation anywhere on the site during the Middle Bronze Age. Nowhere have we penetrated to virgin soil; thus the history of occupation during the periods preceding the Early Bronze Age is unknown.

### The Stairway

At the beginning of the season two fragments of walls running up the north slope of the tell were faintly visible from the surface. A sounding between the line of these two walls revealed a stairway built of wadi stones and a mud-brick wall between the two outer walls. During the season we were able to clear the walls from where the steps are preserved at the top down to the bottom where the stairway turns sharply eastward.

The stairway was built by first digging a trench in the side of the hill and then lining the sides of the cut with stones. The inner face of the walls of the stairway is finished off smoothly, while the outer face is rough, made of stones piled against the side of the cut which served to support the wall firmly from the outside. The 40 cm. mud-brick wall that runs down the middle of the stairway served as a support for the beams of the roof which once covered the tunnel.

The stairway is obviously a device for getting to the water of the spring from the city at times when the city gates were closed for protection against enemy attack. The strong indications that the stairway was roofed and hidden below the surface of the tell suggest that this measure for the civilian defense of the city was a secret construction. An enemy would not only have to find the line of this tunnel but would have to cut through its roof to destroy it.

There are 77 steps from the right-hand turn at the bottom until the place where the steps were washed away at the top. After the turn to the right at the bottom there are 8 steps that have been thus far uncovered. If one follows the line of the steps of the line of the casemate wall at the top, there would have been approximately 125 steps.

From the sherds found on the steps it is certain that by the early part of Iron II — possibly the end of the 9th century — the stairway had fallen into disuse. No sherds later than early Iron II appear in the debris taken from between the walls of the stairway. The latest sherds appearing in the firm debris through which the trench for the stairway was cut are those of the Iron I Age. It is thus likely that the tunnel was built some time in the Iron I period. There is evidence for reconstruction in the upper dozen steps. Possibly the kind of wash which finally destroyed the upper part of this stairway had earlier taken its toll of the same segment of the structure.

The reason for the right-hand turn at the bottom of the long segment of the stairs is the presence of an earlier road leading to the city gate at the west side of the tell. Remnants of the road remain just beyond the wall which borders the stairway.

### **Sounding on the Bench**

In an attempt to make a sounding in the Early Bronze Age material on the bench we encountered the Late Bronze and Iron I cemetery. The most important tomb was one lined with mud brick, the burial of a woman of considerable importance, possibly a queen. The skeleton was extended, lying on its back, with the head to the west and the feet to the east. The inventory of burial goods included the following: five bronze vessels, a bronze tripod of Cypriot design, 4 ivory boxes, an ivory spoon with human head, 500 carnelian beads, 75 gold beads, two silver toggle pins, a silvery chain with two silver plates decorated with herringbone design attached, a bronze lamp, and five pottery jars. The tomb is closely dated to about 1200 B.C. by a locally made Cypriot Pyxis. The quality of the workmanship exhibited in the metal objects and the abundance of metal make this one of the richest tombs yet discovered in Jordan.

To the west of this tomb was another unique burial. Bronze was abundant, although not so well preserved. There were six bowls of bronze and a sword with handle, measuring 53 cms. in length. The bones of the man were encased in bitumen along with the sword.

Surrounding these two major burials were ten other burials of people obviously of less importance. All the tombs had been cut in debris of the Early Bronze Age. The most distinctive feature of this cemetery is the widespread use of bronze in cauldrons and bowls for burial goods. It is reasonable to suppose that metal was abundant here in the Iron I Age and that local craftsmen had developed a high skill in working gold, silver and bronze.

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