

Tel Beth-Shemesh Report, 2010

Number 4

The excavation is now over for this season. This is not to imply that the work is finished. People are often surprised at the brevity of our excavation seasons. Ours are usually 4 weeks, although there are some who dig for 6 and a few even 8 weeks, very few excavate longer than that per year. Part of the reason is that funding restricts the duration of the field work (our excavation operates on a shoestring budget compared to most projects). Perhaps the most constraining point, however, is that the mass of material uncovered in the season is far more than enough to process in the ensuing year. Usually we are behind, especially since most of us are professors and otherwise engaged—there is a real sense in which our work is a labor of love; few archaeologists are full-time archaeologists involved simply in digging and research.

The primary investigators of the excavation—Professor Shlomo Bunimovitz and Dr. Zvi Lederman of Tel Aviv University—both emphasized numerous times how impressed they have been with the crew that came this year. They noted the diligence of the work and the cooperation of the crew. Even though few of the volunteers had any excavation experience, they learned quickly and produced meaningful data.



The week's work did not reveal a lot of new architecture, but refined a number of features that we had excavated. One of the squares chronically had yielded very little—only one component of architecture and that was the first week! Because of the void of architecture, the students began to postulate that it was a dance floor; Scott Huff, a volunteer from Freed-Hardeman, even composed a song about the void of the square and suggested it was a dance floor (he generally kept us in stitches). A number of interesting pieces, however, came from the square. One was what we often refer to as a

beer juglet. This sample is a round bodied vessel with a small spout attached to the side; a number of holes pierce the side of the vessel to strain the liquid as one pours it out.

Scott discovered a very nice cosmetic palette. These are rather rare, and I would like to know what might have been ground in it. Some suggested it was a soap dish and put a small round “petrified” soap stone in it.

Another find was a very nice jar that Kolin Sperle of Overland Park, Kansas found and excavated. Kolin was a valuable worker in the excavation of the burned mudbrick from the last two years and he has a knack for finding interesting items.





The last day of the dig was extremely dirty. We had to fill sand bags with soil and stack them against some of the remains from previous years. This was to try to preserve them and was dictated by the Israel Antiquity Authority. We usually have to do something like that, but this year it was not quite as “dust-flying” as usual, but it was still bad enough.

We rested on Friday and Saturday, some of us rented an Arab-driven taxi to take us to Jericho for the morning. Sharon and I had secured the taxi driver’s services in 2007 when we traveled around in Israel and I have contacted him a few times since then (he looks a lot like Tony Bennett, but he can’t sing worth beans [which he admits]).

The trip to the Jordan Valley is always interesting. To watch the landscape pass in the distance of about 15 miles and transform from fairly green to dead brown and then to see the oasis of Jericho is impressive.

Along the way, I saw several herds of sheep/goat and several bedouin camps. Most of the bedouin



choose to live in tents and shacks.

Some of the bedouin can have very luxurious accommodations, but most of them seem to be hovels. The fellow who watches over our site while we are off during the dig season is a bedouin and keeps his tent at the base of the hill. The bedouin lifestyle is a mystery. I have read a good bit about them and their traditions and beliefs are quite peculiar.



Our passage into Jericho was very smooth—without incident at all! The Palestinians have done a good job in setting up the information at Jericho. The Italians have assisted in the producing the signs and directions. The town is quite small (only about 10 acres) and, of course, is the first town that the Israelites encountered when they entered the Promised Land.

The highlight of the trip to me was the visit to Elisha’s Spring, mentioned in 2 Kings 2:19-22. One can be fairly confident that this is the spring that is mentioned in the text since it is the major source of water in the area and always has been as far as we know.

I want to thank you again for your interest and support.

Dale

