

Tel Beth-Shemesh Report, 2012

Number 1

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The flight from the USA to Israel went reasonably well although Continental (now changed to United) changed my flight and did not apprise me of it. They rerouted me from Little Rock to Newark to Tel Aviv to another route from Little Rock to **Houston** to Newark to Tel Aviv! Fortunately I made all the connections on time and luggage arrived safely. Two years in a row now, Frank Wheeler of York College and I have randomly chosen seats and ended up on the same row—this time across the aisle from each other! We connected with our other colleagues from the states after arriving in Jerusalem.

After our arrival on Friday, we had to kill some time before being able to check in to our hotel. I needed to secure another telephone, so we went to Beth-shemesh (modern town) to Office Depot. As a relevant aside, I'm reading a novel that Sharon gave me entitled the *Bone Box*. It is about an archaeologist excavating the Caiaphas tomb. The main Israeli in the novel has repeatedly said "Nothing is easy in Israel." Through the years, I have definitely noted that this is true. To get the kind of phone I need, requires that I go to three different places! And now I have found out that they did not have the phone that I want (fortunately they can order it)!

I met a group from Nebraska, from a town approximately 30 miles from York where Frank teaches and they mentioned that their leader was Mark Meehl! I worked with Mark in the 1980s at Tel Migne and was surprised to see him in the country with a tour group.

After a nice night's rest partially to recover from over 24 hours of not sleeping (one can challenge whether it is possible to sleep on a plane in coach or not), on Saturday we went to Herodion, the massive retreat that Herod the Great built and where a few years ago Ehud Netzer discovered parts of the mausoleum/sarcophagus in which Herod was buried (the photo is an artist's model of what they think the mausoleum looked like). The actual location of Herod's burial had been a matter of dispute, but it appears that Netzer has solved it. Regretfully, Netzer died at the site after a fall of some 10 meters and did not get to finish his work.



The drive back to Jerusalem took us near Bethlehem, which is surrounded by a tall concrete wall that the Israelis have built to try to curtail some of the terrorist activity.

On Sunday, we planned to have worship and communion at the Garden Tomb. Some believe that the Garden Tomb is where Jesus was buried after being crucified at the "Gordon's Calvary" nearby. That conclusion, however, is very unlikely in view of the fact that the "calvary" was a site created during the Middle Ages as the result of quarrying for rock. The tomb as well is a

classically designed tomb from the Divided Monarchy and is part of a complex of tombs. The irony of our visit is that the site is closed on Sundays, not permitting people to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus at a site claimed by many to be where that event occurred! We ended up having our worship in the dead-end road leading to the facility. One reason we opted for that was because it was quiet with the prospect of little or no interruption.



We continued into the city to eat and while in the restaurant, one of my fellow doctoral students from the University of Arizona entered with a group of students with which she is working at Jezreel. Another surprise meeting of a fellow archaeologist!

After lunch, we went to the City of David site to go through the Canaanite tunnel that predates the Hezekiah's tunnel is likely the one referred to in Chronicles as he sought to secure it from the Assyrians (2 Chr 32:4). On the way to that location, I was standing just south of Dung Gate and saw Jesse Long and his wife Joanne from Lubbock Christian! The next day I was privileged to take them to Tel Qeiyafa on the edge of the Elah Valley.



We continued our trip, however, to tunnel and then traced the trail to the Pool of Siloam passing remains of the Middle Bronze Age and Iron Age walls of Jerusalem (the photo is from inside the tunnel and the second photo is of the remains of the walls). We also examined what some have affirmed were the royal tombs of the Davidic dynasty, but there are some serious questions about that attribution.

One of our goals was to go through the newly opened drainage tunnel that has been excavated from the Western Wall down the Tyropean Valley ending near the Pool of Siloam. Josephus refers to the Roman efforts to search out and kill the Jews who were in the drainage system (Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 6.9.4). This at least is part of the system to which he alludes. It was an eerie journey as we imagined the terror of people seeking refuge from the brutality of the Roman destruction of 70 AD! (Photo to right is inside the tunnel).



Our excavation began on Tuesday with the typical cleaning up and putting the squares in order. We needed to lower a number of baulks for safety reasons as well as logistical reasons. Baulks

are the stands of soil that we leave between the various squares. They serve two major purposes: 1) to preserve a record of the various layers through which we dig (often the information in them serves to correct and/or modify our understanding of what is going on), and 2) to provide traffic areas by which to enter and leave the squares without tromping through the other squares and the work being done there.

By the end of the week, we were poised to proceed in earnest into new territory and we are excited to see what unfolds.

A few small items came to light. Among them are three beautiful beads; one was a fossil that had been drilled into a bead; a second was a dark brown long flattened stone with hues of red in it; the third was made of carnelian. We also located two murex shell fish shells. Murex shellfish are the source of the most valued of purple dyes of the ancient world. According to Philip King and Lawrence Stager in their book *Life in Biblical Israel*, it takes approximately 8000 of these fish to produce one cubic centimeter of purple dye. (For those who are “metrically challenged” a centimeter is less than a half of an inch!). No wonder purple was a color associated with royalty—they were generally the only ones who could afford it! There is no evidence that Bethshemesh was a production center for this dye—the ocean is some 20 miles away. The shells were probably brought as keepsakes or perhaps raw material out of which to make beads or something.

An interesting artifact came from Frank Wheeler and Jerry Culbertson’s square—it was a small clay bowl made by hand. It is curious whether this might have been made by a child rather than an adult. Careful examination does not reveal any specific finger prints, but the finger indentations are clearly visible.

We resume our work on Sunday and anxiously look forward to what might come to light.

I will file another posting next weekend reporting on our excursions this weekend.

Until then,

Shalom.

Dale