

2016 TEL BETH-SHEMESH, ISRAEL EXCAVATIONS - Report #2 (and other events)

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Our second weekend involved a visit to Jerusalem again. I usually lead a group of folks who come because of some connection with me into the city for a foot tour of the Church of the



Holy Sepulcher, the Western Wall and the City of David. In addition, a new exhibit was open in the “tower of David” citadel which permitted us to visit recently excavated remains of part of Herod’s palace and Hezekiah’s wall. Sadly, the extent of Titus’ destruction of Jerusalem almost totally obliterated Herod’s palace, but fragments of it may still be seen. Very impressive is the flight of steps into one of his swimming pools at in Jerusalem (see left). Given the paucity of rainfall in Palestine, to have such large swimming pools is impressive.

Much of the water to supply the needs of Jerusalem came through the Hebron hills and Bethlehem from what are known as “Solomon’s Pools,” but the term is a misnomer; the distance, however, covers some 21 kilometers (= ca. 13 miles; the picture to the right shows an Ottoman period ceramic pipe placed into the original Hasmonean/Herodian conduit, which was actually quite larger than the Ottoman pipe). Water from these sources also fed the constant needs of the Temple ceremonies which required enormous quantities to fulfill all the washing rituals associated with the sacrificial system as delineated in Leviticus and elsewhere.



The excavations also uncovered more of the “Broad Wall” that served as part of Hezekiah’s attempt to protect the enlarged population of Jerusalem (see next page). While the remnant of the wall was not as impressive as the customary site that people visit, it serves as testimony of Hezekiah’s concern for his people and also to help us delineate the western extent of the fortification system. The



Bible alludes to the construction of the wall when God indicts the people of Jerusalem with placing too much confidence in the defensive measure that were being taken: “you counted the houses of Jerusalem and you broke down the houses to fortify the wall” (Isa. 22:10). The indictment seems not to be of Hezekiah himself, but the people’s misplaced confidence. The book of Nehemiah later refers to the wall as “the Broad Wall” and then only as a point of reference in the description of the city (Neh. 3:8).



On Saturday, we returned to Jerusalem to visit the Israel Museum. There is a special display focusing on “Pharaoh in Canaan.” One item in the display is a commemorative scarab of Amenhotep III celebrating his marriage to Tiy. This scarab (left) was discovered by Elihu Grant in the excavations at Tel Beth-Shemesh in the 1920s/1930s, but it was not in a chronologically correct level—it had become essentially an heirloom. Particularly meaningful was the fact that we have found a second scarab of Amenhotep III which commemorated his 30th anniversary as king (right)—the discovery of our scarab was in the Late Bronze Age palace contemporary with

Amenhotep’s reign! Thus Beth-Shemesh has yielded TWO commemorative scarabs of the notable Egyptian monarch! The palace that we are uncovering is the palace in which the second scarab was found!



One aspect of archaeology that tantalizes us is we never know what will come to light—that is part of what keeps us going!

The week’s work continued a good bit of refined cleaning to begin generally in earnest to excavate. Given the fact that a large portion of where we were going to work was last excavated in the 1990s, a huge amount of wash and erosion had taken its toll. In addition, the stand of soil that had never been excavated posed a challenge to try to bring it down so that the work in what we call the “uptown” has all been brought generally into the same period. Our work did not prove disappointing. Valiant work finally yielded a stretch of cobble pavement (next page) that we think was part of a stabling system, which was destroyed in ca. 800 BC in the battle in which



Jehoash of Israel fought against Amaziah, king of Judah at Bethshemesh and apparently destroyed the site (cf. 2 Kings 14:11-13). The establishment of the building *could* go back into the Solomonic period which would interestingly corroborate the Bible's affirmation of Solomon's marketing horses and chariots (1 Kings 10:26-29). In the academic literature there is a huge argument of whether these structures (which are rather common throughout Israel and Judah) were horse stables or store houses. I am of

the opinion that they were generic structures that people adapted to the needs of the occasion, similar to many of the metal fabricated buildings in the USA which have been adapted to factories, businesses, sports facilities, churches, etc.

Among the small finds that have tantalized us is a fragment of a female pillar figurine (held by Dr. Philip Thompson of Harding University, but not found by him), an "eye of Horus" pendant and a pendant of Bes (an Egyptian god).

Our plan is to go to Herodion, Arad and Beersheba the weekend of June 24-25. That should be the focus of the next report. Until then... Shalom and Salaam.

