

## Excavations at Tel Beth-Shemesh -- 2015 and Other Musings -- 4b

Dale W. Manor, Ph.D.

Field Director of the Excavations, Tel Beth-Shemesh  
Professor of Archaeology and Bible, Harding University

As is usual, the last week of excavation almost always is filled with surprises and is somewhat abbreviated because of the need to clean up for final photographs. This year's dig was no exception, but it was not quite as pronouncedly surprising as some previous seasons. One of the emphases we had was to section the olive press. We finally succeeded to do this and it looked quite impressive. The photograph that shows the section most directly (photo left; the large stones in the middle of the photograph are the middle components of the press) reflects the construction of the press. We removed the side walls back to half the circumference of the press. The side walls were made of heavy stones which were then very well plastered to contain the



olive oil. These side walls rested adjacent to a very thick round slab of stone, measuring about ten inches thick!

This thick slab helps explain another stone that rests randomly on top of the site which Elihu Grant's team had extracted in 1928-1932. We had dubbed the stone from Grant's time as Bennie; this one might be ben-Ben (No! Wait! That sounds too Egyptian!) The second photo (below left) shows the press from above. The photo (below right) with the single stone is one of the press stones in the facility. Notice the slick, worn surfaces on the top

indicating the wear that the stone had been put to in its productive years. The smoothness implies a lot of friction and work. It is humbling to think of the people working with these





heavy stones to crush olives (one also wonders how many people suffered broken and bruised feet and legs from this enterprise!).

One of the exciting moments for most excavators is to find something unique and/or special. Peter McGraw (photo left) of Harding School of Theology in Memphis holds a nice fragment of a bowl known as a Cypriot milk bowl. It dates from the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Regretfully we did not find the rest of it. On the next to last day of the excavation, Peter's square uncovered an extremely well constructed paved platform (photo left). The stones are embedded in a plaster matrix implying some special kind of construction, but we will have to wait until another season to find out what this is.



In the photo (below right; a complete pyxis appears in the lower left corner [from the Israel Museum]), I demonstrate how the broken pieces of a special vessel called a pyxis fit together. Two of these vessels

were uncovered within about two hours by Ori Lederman, the niece of Zvi Lederman, one of the directors of the dig. I dubbed her the "pyxis pixie." Her observation skills were finely honed to recognize the uniqueness of the broken pieces. Among other finds were some pieces of jewelry.





The photograph (left) is of a corroded copper/bronze earring.  
The excavators in the square also found a corroded finger ring a bit earlier in the day.



Our aerial photos (upper left) were accomplished using the quadricopter (upper right) that we purchased last year with the generous contributions of Mark and Becky Lanier of Houston, Texas. They contributed further to the work this year, which permitted us to upgrade elements of the quadricopter to provide more stability with the photos and with stronger engines to provide

greater versatility. We extend our thanks to the Laniers for their generous contribution to our project. (In the photo are [L-R]: Zvi Lederman, Shlomo Bunimovitz, Dale W. Manor, and Omer Ze'evi.)



One goal of our work is to provide a teaching environment where students learn how to dig, how to think about the site, and how to integrate those experiences and finds into the larger context of historical and cultural meaning. This involves frequent

lectures outside the excavation experience itself. Several people gave lectures on various topics. In the photograph (left), I am discussing the question of how archaeology and biblical studies relate to one another, which generated a good bit of conversation among the students.



After the excavation, Frank and I spent time mainly in Jerusalem unwinding and seeing things at a leisurely pace. We returned to the site where I ceremoniously left my dig boots that had worn out after four seasons of excavation. I had repaired them about five times with some glue from a store in Beit Shemesh. I was surprised that all of the repairs that I made remained intact; the shoes just wore thin and finally gave out! While at the site, we visited the cistern again (it has been several years since I was in the cistern at Beth-Shemesh) and we took additional photographs.



A surprise was the visit by the fox that had visited us in the course of the excavation. Several times we would look up to see the fox peering over the edge into the squares. On one occasion, a volunteer took a video of the fox; it was considering advancing further toward us, but it turned aside. Frank and I saw the fox twice on this final visit and I managed to catch a photograph of it (photo left). Beth-Shemesh is only about four miles from Timnah where the Bible says that Samson caught some 300 foxes and torched the fields of the people of Timnah (1 Sam 15).

Jerusalem is always a fascinating place to visit. Wandering through the Old City is an adventure with a wild mixture of sights and smells. The open meat market reminds me of Paul's discussions regarding the meat markets in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8 (photo upper left).

Just down the passage another open-air venue was baking pita or something like pancakes (photo bottom left). The last evening in Jerusalem, Frank



and I went to Ben Yehuda street for dinner and passed a hookah bar (photo bottom right)!







One of my hopes had been to visit the site of Shiloh where the Israelite tabernacle rested during the days of Eli and the first part of Samuel's life (1 Sam 1-6). Earlier, this had been where Joshua instructed the remaining tribes to parse the land into their inheritances (Josh 18). Jeremiah would later allude to the presence of the sacrificial system at the tabernacle in Shiloh when he upbraided Judah for refusing to recognize that God stands above earthly structures (cf. Jer 7:12-15). God had permitted Shiloh to be destroyed, just as he would permit

the Babylonians to destroy the Jerusalem temple since Israel had refused to listen to his pleas for repentance.

Yossi Paz, Harding's premier guide in Israel, took Frank and me to the site. I had been near the site on a trip with my parents in 1975 or so, but we did not stop. Shiloh rests along the main north-south road in the central hills extending from the Jezreel Valley in the north to Jerusalem and then Hebron southward. It was very well situated to serve as the central sanctuary site for Israel before David captured Jerusalem soon after he became king. The slope leading up to the site is quite steep (photo above right) and serves as a natural defensive mechanism on which earlier inhabitants had built an additional fortification glacis to protect the earlier site.



The Danes conducted excavations at the site in the 1930s and then an Israeli project occurred in the 1980s. Both projects uncovered remains dating to the late 12<sup>th</sup>-early 11<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. Among these remains were a series of buildings that contained what are known as "collar-rim storage jars" (photo middle right; from the Eretz Israel Museum); these jars flourished during the time that Israel emerged in the central hills and are often characteristic of the Israelite settlements. The two projects uncovered more than sixty of these vessels. (This year, we found shattered evidence of probably three of these vessels at Beth-Shemesh.) These vessels were huge and much discussion swirls around their significance as far as function and possible ethnic connections. The excavations have found no significant evidence of settlement at



the site. Instead it appears to have been a formalized administrative center of some kind. The buildings were generally used for some kind of storage (and perhaps redistribution) function (photo previous page lower right; the storage jars in the right hand of the picture are reproductions to show roughly how the jars were situated).

The excavated buildings flanked the Middle Bronze Age fortification system and were buried under an extensive destruction level, which the excavators suggested probably resulted from the destruction of the site at the hands of the Philistines as implied in the biblical narrative after Israel lost custody of the ark of the covenant in their battle at Apheq (cf. 1 Sam 4). The Bible does not note explicitly that the Philistines destroyed the site, but this event is probably the basis of the allusion to Shiloh's destruction by Jeremiah. The date of Shiloh's end is placed in the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> century (i.e., ca. 1050 B.C.).

A natural question that rises is: "Where was the tabernacle?" Finkelstein and others argue that the tabernacle was on the summit of the hill, upslope from the storage facilities. Others have pointed out a large level area immediately to the north of the site that is oriented in an east-west axis (photo right) with

dimensions appropriate to accommodate the measurements of the tabernacle and its courtyard. The perimeter of the leveled area shows evidence of carving and shaping (photo bottom right), perhaps to accommodate the tabernacle. Yossi asked me what I thought of the proposal. The large open area cries out for some kind of explanation in the middle of otherwise hilly terrain—especially with the cut

edges apparently to accommodate something. Given the orientation of the area and its dimensions, its proposal as the site for the tabernacle is viable. A downside, however, is the slight downhill slope from east to west. Our guide for the visit was the husband of the primary archaeologist of the site and he informed us that the investigations in the large area are on-going. It will be interesting to see what comes to light.

Thus, the 2015 season of excavation and travel in Israel comes to an end. While we did not fully reach our goals for this year's work at the excavation, we are on the threshold to enter the Late Bronze Age palace of Nin-ur-



mah-mesh next year (part of which we uncovered in 2008 and 2009).

We solicit any financial help you can provide. Make contributions to “Harding University” and indicate the funds for the Tel Beth-Shemesh excavations. Mail them to: Dale W. Manor; Tel Beth-Shemesh Excavations; Box 12280, Harding University; Searcy, AR 72149. Contributions are tax-deductible.

#### Bibliography:

Finkelstein, Israel. 1993. “Shiloh.” Pp. 1364-70 in *New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, vol. 4. Ed. E. Stern. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society & Carta; New York: Simon & Schuster.

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