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Father H. Vincent

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# THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVOCATION OF A BIBLICAL SITE—NOTES OF A VISIT TO THE EXPLORATIONS AT BETH-SHEMESH ('AIN SHEMS).

By THE REV. FATHER H. VINCENT, O.P.

*École Biblique et Archéologique, Jerusalem.*

THE reader must not be alarmed by the title of this paper. The *Quarterly Statement* does not devote its pages to spiritualistic operations, but I cannot think of a better word than "invocation" to express in short my feelings on leaving the ruins of 'Ain Shems on Saturday, 13th May. But in this case, the invocation has not been transitory; it will have a permanent effect, and will cause the greatest pleasure and excite the keenest interest among Biblical scholars; its results will become clearer, hour by hour, not by the help of the magic ring of some wizard, but by the pickaxe of skilled explorers. And it remains for the lovers of the Bible to insure that the invocation shall be soon completed in the smallest detail, by increasing the funds of the Society, and thus giving the necessary means to Dr. Mackenzie and the architect, Mr. Newton, and enabling them to evolve from the very characteristic remains a complete history of Beth-Shemesh, not less interesting, and clearer in detail than the story already told of this important Biblical site.<sup>1</sup>

The place is Beth-Shemesh, rescued from oblivion by the campaign of exploration recently taken in hand by the Committee, who are much to be congratulated on their happy selection of a site.<sup>2</sup> When I accepted the kind invitation of Sir Charles Watson to accompanying him to the excavations, I expected a pleasant and

<sup>1</sup> Sketched with the keenest accuracy by Mr. Stanley A. Cook in the *Q.S.*, July, 1910, pp. 220-231.

<sup>2</sup> I believe the late lamented Sir Charles Wilson was anxious to have this site investigated. Barely a month has passed since the work began, and I wish that every student of Biblical history, and of Oriental archaeology, could come and see what has been done, so that they might unite in forwarding the undertaking.

instructive day in a place very familiar and dear to me, but, knowing how the exceptionally severe winter had postponed the time of commencing work, I had only hoped to see the preliminary operations in progress, and the first trenches dug on the sides of the Tell: four weeks is a short time to give any well-developed results at the commencement of an excavation.

Soon after we left the station of Deir Aban, and before the train had resumed its journey down the Valley of Sorek, we had passed the short distance to the ruins of 'Ain Shems, and were met

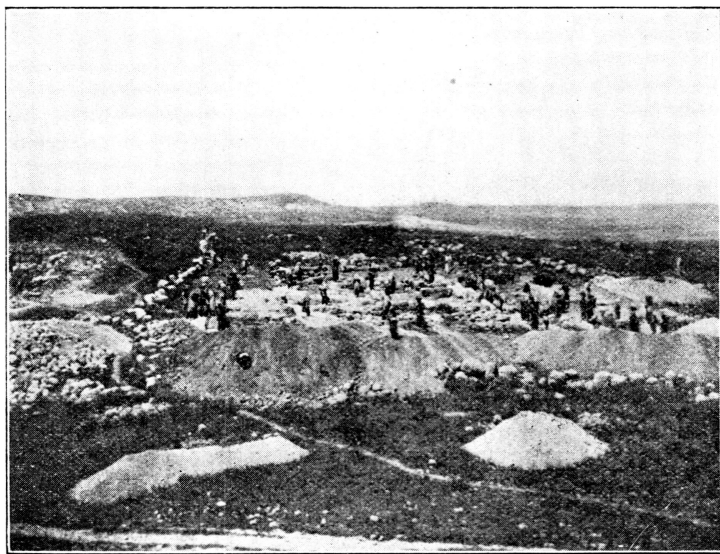


FIG. 1.—Beth-Shemesh. General View of the Work.

by a scene of life and animation at a place where, many times before, I had only met with the impression of desolation and death. Under a shady olive grove was the camp of the explorers. In the radiant light of the spring morning the old wely of Abu Meizar seemed to have regained some of its youth, and hid its dilapidation under the branches of the sacred tree. But I was really astonished to see close at hand, to the west of the wely and on the slope of the Tell, usually so monotonously clothed with thistles—green or dry according to the season—part of an old town exposed to view, while on the crest I saw a line of ramparts, and above, a strange little army,

working with activity : and then the chiefs of these peaceful soldiers came down to meet us with outstretched hands. We were close to the door of the wely and the Director invited us to enter.

In the courtyard, where I used to see in former days some implement of agriculture or other humble goods, left in the security of the holy place, were long lines of baskets full of pieces of pottery, waiting to be cleaned and classified. Some workmen, entrusted with the duty of the first cleaning, were divesting little vases and fine pieces of their coating of earth, and I immediately sat down beside them to examine the most attractive specimens. Here were royal Israelite jar-handles, on one of which I could clearly read the inscription, "To the king, Hebron," and a remarkable series dating from the Israelite monarchy ; then characteristic pieces of the later Canaanite period ; while among fragments of oldest Semitic pottery were fine specimens of flint implements, showing that the origins of civilization at Beth-Shemesh were more ancient than one learns from Bible history, or from the tablets of Assyria. But the gem of this large collection was a box in which had been brought together the fragments of several small jars decorated in the well-defined Aegean style. The fineness of the execution, the skill of the artist, and the elegance of the shapes make one pretty sure that these vases must have been imported from various Aegean centres. This little archaeological treasure is in good hands, and could not have a better interpreter than Dr. Mackenzie, well known as a writer on Cretan pottery, and one who is better acquainted than most people with the pottery of the Aegean Sea. After a little time we shall see the collection classified and their forms restored by Dr. Mackenzie, who may be able to tell us their origin and whether they came from Cyprus or Rhodes, or some more distant island, and were brought by foreign people within the walls of Beth-Shemesh.

Even a cursory examination of the fragments enabled one to fix some dates, but one must wait for a careful examination, especially of some pieces, apparently outside the usual series, which make one think of the Philistine question, and there can be no doubt that these early finds at Beth-Shemesh will prove to have great value, archaeologically and historically.

Discussing such matters with Dr. Mackenzie we entered the door of the wely, which, at first sight, I could hardly recognize. In place of the grey walls, stained with oil and scribbled over, which I had known for twenty years, I saw clean walls, hidden to a great

extent by the shelves upon which the various objects are arranged as they are classified. Mohammed Effendi Ibrahim Elbi, the intelligent representative of the Department of Antiquities, was working at the shelves and preparing his lists, just as if he were in a museum. Before the mihrab, and against the ancient stones, arranged like an altar, were the theodolite, levels, rods, and photographic apparatus of Mr. Newton, while his drawing-table was placed near the door, and on great sheets of paper, fixed against the wall, were drawn the plan of the ground, the line of fortification already

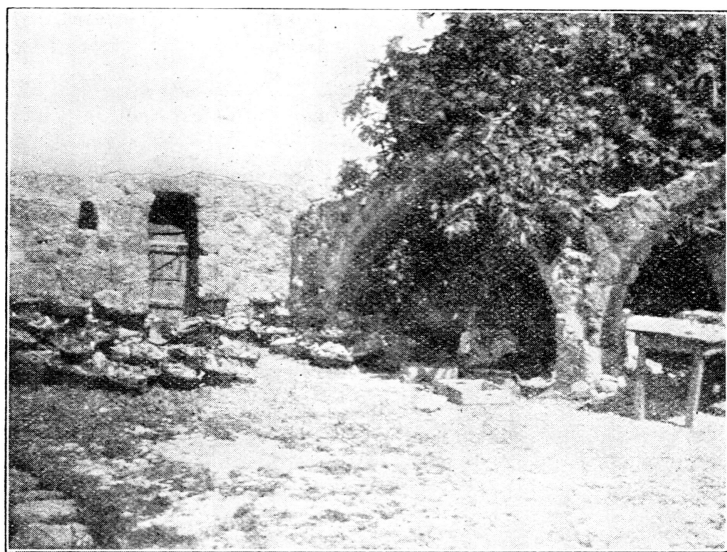


FIG. 2.—Beth-Shemesh. Courtyard of the Wely.

discovered, and other details. Could there be a more original workshop, or one more ancient and more suited for archaeological study? I had not been prepared for so complete a change in the wely of my old friend Sheikh Abu Meizar. In the days long ago, when I first knew it, I used to see, if not himself, at least his faithful adherents, who would not have appreciated such archaeological indiscretions. We were indeed admitted, but strong objections were raised when we attempted to touch the holy stone, redolent of grease, in order to find out what it was, as it had the appearance of an ancient, roughly-cut capital. In those days,

Abu Meizar had a great reputation, and, if his story was not very definite, the curious legends connected with him bore a considerable resemblance to some of the details of the history of Samson.<sup>1</sup>

A little later the Jewish colony of Artuf was established, and, under its influence, the Biblical characteristics of the wely became more marked, and its importance for the Mohammedan fellahin gradually diminished. Year by year there was a decline in their devotion to a saint who showed a tendency to relapse to Judaism. The intelligent people of Deir Aban, Beit Netif, and the neighbourhood soon knew an amusing little history, revised and corrected, of Abu Meizar, or el-Jebbar,<sup>2</sup> as he was then called. Not meeting with the respect he was accustomed to, our hero emigrated to the high-place of Surah, having been seized with a sudden wish to be nearer his brother, Sheikh es-Samet, the other half of the great personality of Shemshun el-Jebbar, but he remained in possession of his old sanctuary and came back when he felt so disposed; as, however, it is never quite certain where he is, there is no objection to infidels entering the wely. Even holy men may have changeable dispositions! So much the better, as, in the present case, the fickleness of Abu Meizar has given the Palestine Exploration Fund an ideal *pied à terre*. At Gezer, it was the Maccabean princes who gave Prof. R. A. S. Macalister a workshop in the ruins of their palace; at Beth-Shemesh it is the local Ba'al who shelters under his roof the explorers of his domain. All honour to his kindness. Let us now see what these explorers have already done.

The other day little was known of Beth-Shemesh except the name; now, not only has the exact site of the great city been found, but we can also wonder at its wall, measure its circuit and its area, and understand with some accuracy the principal events in its history. I cannot, of course, describe all that I have seen, and plans, drawings, and photographs would be required for a proper account. The wall which has been found is almost complete and surrounds the crest of the hill or lies on the first escarpment. Where it is on the crest, this wall, built of very massive stones, roughly cut, appears to be in two or three courses, and the upper portion,<sup>3</sup> possibly of smaller stones, has been destroyed and removed during

<sup>1</sup> See *Archaeological Researches in Palestine in 1873-74*, by Prof. Clermont-Ganneau, Vol. II, pp. 209, 218.

<sup>2</sup> Abbreviated from Shemshun el-Jebbar.

<sup>3</sup> At some period also made of sun-dried bricks.

the course of centuries. But on the eastern escarpment, opposite the wely, the wall is twelve or fifteen feet high, and the great stones present a fine appearance, and such as the importance of Beth-Shemesh demands, situated as it is at the junction of several great roads, leading from the coast districts to the hill country. Quadrilateral bastions of variable width, and generally projecting but little, flank the wall, of which the defence was skilfully arranged by the salients, traced so as to suit the rocky ground.

About the middle of the south side of the enceinte, Dr. Mackenzie has found a gate in excellent preservation. It would be difficult to



FIG. 3.—Beth-Shemesh. The South Gate in the Wall.

imagine a better example of a fortified gate, built in the ancient Syrian or Asiatic fashion, with a narrow entrance, and a fairly long passage between side chambers for the guard and for the defence of the door.<sup>1</sup> It reminds one of a gate in the palace of Panammu in Zenjirli, and makes one think of the gates of the Temple as described in Ezekiel's vision. A comparison of this wall at Beth-Shemesh, with other walls of which the dates are known, as, for

<sup>1</sup> Fortified city gates of the same kind have been found at Khorsabad, in Assyria, at Eujuk, in the Hittite country, and elsewhere.

example, at Gezer, makes one inclined to think it is of the time of the Israelite kingdom, but there appears to be ample evidence that long before the erection of this fine wall at Beth-Shemesh there was another, perhaps of less extent, and that, in any case, the site has been inhabited for many, many centuries. A clear indication of this early occupation is given by the number of flint implements found in the lower strata of the ruins and in the trial pits, but specially by the finds in a large burial cave on the eastern slope of the Tell. The exploration of this is not yet complete, and the collapse of the roof, either from some earthquake shock, or from some incident in the wars in ancient times round the city, diminish the hope of finding articles intact, or undisturbed burials. But for an expert like Dr. Mackenzie the fragments have a meaning, and nothing escapes his notice. I will say nothing more of this interesting cave except that it seems to have been closed up at some ancient epoch and not used afterwards.

A thick layer of apparently burnt *débris* lies at a somewhat uniform level over part of the town already excavated. Such a layer in the archaeological series is like a heading in capitals at the beginning of a chapter of history, as it probably closes a period completely, and above it another commences. Historians have told us what is known of Beth-Shemesh from the written records: Dr. Mackenzie will shortly let us know what he finds above and below this heading of an archaeological epoch. It is dangerous to hazard an opinion after a cursory examination, but it struck me that this layer of burnt *débris* might mark a line between the Canaanite and the Israelite periods. If this should prove to be so, and if the fire were the result of a definite conquest by the Hebrews, it would tend to prove that this capture of Beth-Shemesh was rather late, as the remains above the burnt *débris* show a connection with Aegean-Cypriote influences, which can hardly be put earlier than the tenth or beginning of the ninth century B.C., in the inland parts of Judaea. It is possible that this matter may throw some light on the much debated question of Philistine civilization.

On the other hand, the fire might have been an incident in the Egyptian conquest, which occurred between 1600 and 1550 B.C. This would enlarge the perspective of the history of the town, as the burnt layer is higher than the middle of the total accumulation of *débris*. For if the eight or ten centuries of the Semitic period after 1550 B.C. have only left an accumulation of six to seven feet, the

depth of eight to nine feet under the level would bring us ten centuries further back. The indication is worth consideration, and I could see fragments on the site which appeared contemporaneous with the first age of metals and with the Semitic invasion of from 2500 to 2250 B.C. It certainly appears to me that the specialists who appreciated the importance and antiquity of Beth-Shemesh—whatever its original name may have been—took a clear-sighted view, and the results, so far obtained, proves the accuracy of their judgment.

Inhabited, apparently without interruption, from the Neolithic period to the Captivity, the city seems to have been abandoned

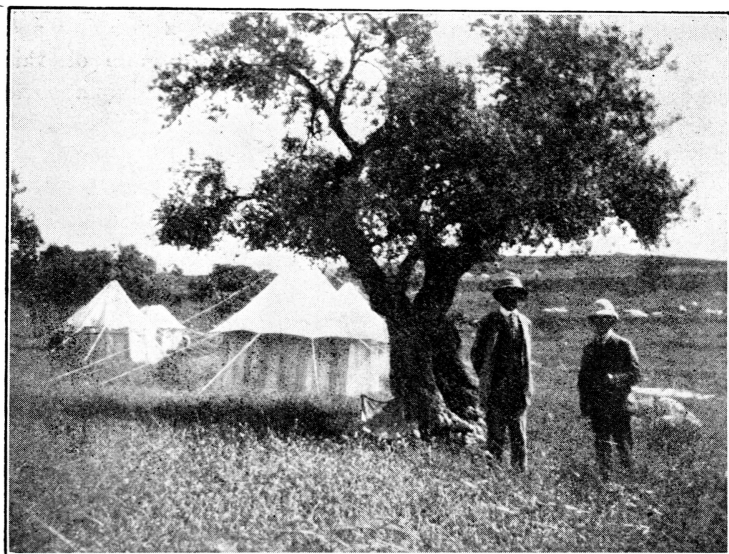


FIG. 4.—Dr. Mackenzie and Mr. Newton in Camp.

during the Hellenistic epoch, and the site probably changed during this and the Roman period. But considerably later, say in the fourth or fifth century A.D., life apparently returned to the ancient ruins, and the remembrance of the Ark of God attracted to the place one of those monastic installations so frequently met with in Palestine and the Negeb. Such an institution, certainly of Christian origin, has been unearthed in the south-eastern part of the Tell.

The hours passed too rapidly, and we were still talking at the foot of the hill when afternoon drew on. We looked down the rich

valley in which the harvest was beginning to ripen, and where some fields are already in the hands of the reapers, and saw in the distance a moving object coming from the country of the Philistines "by the straight road to Beth-Shemesh" and we remembered the dramatic recital of the return of the Ark, and its halt at Beth-Shemesh. But this time it was not a cart drawn by two oxen but a locomotive hauling the train which was to take us back to Jerusalem. So the archaeological pleasures of the day had to come to a conclusion, and we took leave of our friends who have already done so much on the historic site. Dr. Mackenzie and Mr. Newton returned to their labours, while we proceeded to Jerusalem. In conclusion, I would express my thanks to Sir Charles Watson for a most interesting day, where I have, for about the hundredth time during twenty years, visited explorations in progress, and I feel thankful that the Palestine Exploration Fund have found such excellent explorers to carry on the traditions of the Society.

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## THE CHURCH OF THE NATIVITY AT BETHLEHEM.

(REVIEW.)

By ARCHIBALD C. DICKIE, A.R.I.B.A.<sup>1</sup>

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AT last this most historic church has been made the subject of close investigation by a happy combination of experts. The Byzantine Research Fund is to be congratulated upon its first choice of a building marking the advent of possibility in the presentation of a latent building nature which, from lack of national opportunity, had hitherto revealed itself chiefly in the mishandling of Hellenistic forms. By the imposition of an exotic classic dogma, a desire for

<sup>1</sup> *The Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem.* By W. Harvey, W. C. Lethaby, O. M. Dalton, H. A. A. Cruso, and A. E. Headlam, illustrated by drawings and photos by W. Harvey and others. Edited by R. Weir Schultz, and published by B. T. Batsford on behalf of The Byzantine Research Fund. Price 30s. net. Review, reprinted from the *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, 22nd April, 1911. Plan by kind permission of The Byzantine Research Fund.