

## REVIEWS

MAZAR, AMIHAI: *Excavations at Tel Beth-Shean 1989–1996. Volume 1: From the Late Bronze Age IIB to the Medieval Period*. 2006. Pp. xxiv + 736, numerous illustrations. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society/Institute of Archaeology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. ISBN 965-221-058-7. Price: US\$92

Beth-Shean has always been a complicated, somewhat problem site, in terms of its stratigraphy and history. Though the Roman–Byzantine city of Scythopolis at the foot of the mound was excavated from 1984 onwards, the only previous extensive work on the tell itself — aside from a brief season by the Hebrew University in 1983 — was by the University of Pennsylvania Museum in the 1920s and 1930s. The early work, which suffered long publication delays, left many questions about the site unanswered, making the new reports, from the 1989–1996 excavations of the Hebrew University, more than welcome.

One of the primary aims of the new excavations was to reveal how much of the tell was occupied, and to provide the first detailed and accurate topographical maps. These, plus the tables correlating the strata designated in various areas by the University of Pennsylvania Museum and Hebrew University excavators (pp. 12–13) provide two basic and essential aids to understanding the site. Much has now been clarified, but the new reports offer a chequered and sometimes surprising history for the site.

Historical evidence shows that Bronze and Iron Age Beth-Shean was an extremely important centre. At the junction of the Jordan and Harod valleys, it was of key strategic importance and was clearly a focus of Egyptian military interest during the Late Bronze Age. It is mentioned in several Egyptian toponym lists from the 18th–19th Dynasties; stelae were erected here by Seti I and Ramesses II of the 19th Dynasty and, in the 20th, a life-size statue of Ramesses III; biblical references include the famous story of how the Philistines impaled the body of King Saul on its walls. One might, then, assume that ancient Beth-Shean was a fairly sizeable and fortified settlement, but the excavators have come to a somewhat surprising conclusion (pp. 26–27). The Middle Bronze, Late Bronze and Iron Age settlement was limited to the summit of the mound, in an area of 1.4 hectares:

It now appears that this center was a relatively small and unfortified site, composed mainly of administrative buildings, a temple, and a dwelling quarter. The Canaanite settlement that preceded the Egyptian administrative center, as well as that which followed its demise and the Israelite town of the period of the United Monarchy, all occupied only this limited area.

This would mean that the Early Bronze Age settlement was more extensive. It would appear, then, that the major city in the Beth-Shean valley throughout the Late Bronze Age and Iron Ages was the neighbouring settlement at Tel Rehov, 5 km to the south (p. 28). At 10 hectares during the Late Bronze Age, and 5 hectares during the Iron Age, it would have dwarfed Beth-Shean. Again, surprisingly, while this has been identified as the Rehob of a number of Egyptian texts, there seems to be no mention of it in the Old Testament. Still, as Arubas remarks (p. 57), ‘size is only one component, and not necessarily the most significant, in evaluating the status of a city’. Thucydides (1.10.2) asked how future generations would judge the Sparta of his own time if all they had were the remains of its buildings, ‘with no temples or monuments of great magnificence, but simply a collection of villages?’

The new excavations have amply confirmed the importance of Beth-Shean to the Egyptians as a strategic military centre. But despite the stelae of Seti I and Ramesses II (both from the very early 19th dynasty), it would appear that the concentration of Egyptian and egyptianising artefacts from the site is massively concentrated to the time of the early 20th Dynasty, a century later. Mario Martin presents a valuable new study of the locally-made egyptianising pottery (Ch. 5) with a striking result: 7.5% of the forms in Str. Q-3 (19th Dynasty) are Egyptian, jumping to 74.5% in the succeeding Str. Q-2 with nearly the same in Q-1. The date of Str. Q-2 is hard to determine, but it seems to have ended during the late 19th or early 20th Dynasties (about 1200–1180 BC in Martin’s estimation). Mazar and Martin accordingly remark (p. 127): ‘Does this development reflect an increased Egyptian presence at Beth-Shean?’ Indeed it would seem to, as it seems certain that an Egyptian force was garrisoned

here in the time of Ramesses III. (On historical grounds this was most likely early in his reign.) Re-excavation of Building 1500 (Area Q) has confirmed its identity as a small Egyptian-style 'palace', perhaps — as Bill Ward long ago suggested — the residence of one Ramesses Weser-Khepesh, a 'commander of the troops' whose inscribed lintel was found by the Pennsylvania team in Area S to the east. This officer evidently commanded under Ramesses III, at the time when much of the egyptianising pottery was produced: as Martin notes: 'some of the Egyptian-style vessels provide a clear Twentieth-Dynasty date' (p. 152).

The possibility that we are seeing here 'an increased Egyptian presence' during the early part of Dynasty 20 (perhaps beginning under the late 19th Dynasty) prompts a welter of questions and underscores some areas in need of further investigation. One is the nature of the Egyptian imperial involvement at the site in 18th–early 19th Dynasty times, a complex and still controversial issue. Was earlier Egyptian imperial control of the Jezreel valley and environs more indirect or sporadic? The one mention of Beth-Shean in an El-Amarna letter states (complains?) that it was garrisoned by local soldiers from Gath and apparently not by the usual force of Egyptian archers. Second, the nature of the Egyptian involvement under Ramesses III needs further analysis. What was an Egyptian garrison doing in this region at a time when most scholars feel that the Egyptian Asiatic empire had been virtually swept away by the alleged 'Sea Peoples' invasion? (For discussion see Bietak 1993.) In any case the evidence that there was an Egyptian military base here in the reign of Ramesses III (and at Megiddo as well, it would seem), presents a dichotomy for Egyptologists such as Kitchen (1991, 238) who think that Ramesses III campaigned no further north than Edom. Third, on a more detailed point, Martin was unwise to dismiss Robert Porter's suggestion that the name on some plaques and a scarab (previously assigned to Ramesses I or II) belong to Ramesses IV (p. 152). Porter (2008) has now shown in more detail that the particular writing of the name Ramesses best fits Ramesses IV.

Finally, we come back to the question of the lack of fortifications. Benny Arubas, architect for the Hebrew University excavations of the Roman–Byzantine city, takes a different view from the present excavators, stressing the oddity that Beth-Shean apparently had no walls even during the Middle Bronze Age and Iron II, when most cities were fortified (p. 49): 'This situation is certainly very puzzling: why would the very unusual lack of fortifications occur so consistently throughout all periods at this site, when they are so ubiquitous at other sites with a similar history?' Arubas argues that the tell was cut and reshaped in Roman–Byzantine times, removing traces of earlier fortifications, which would allow that the earlier city could have covered some 4 hectares rather than the 1.4 estimated by the excavators. The editor, however, notes that he finds this 'unconvincing' (p. 48).

A possible fortress or citadel — though again no perimeter walls — has been identified in the massive stone Building A of Stratum S-1a, from the Iron IIA period (10th or 9th century depending on whether a high or low chronology is followed). The town continued to be settled throughout the time of the Hebrew monarchy but, according to the excavators, became uninhabited after the Assyrian conquest of 732 BC, only being resettled in Hellenistic times under the name Scythopolis or Nysa (p. 37). Still, this is only one view, challenged long ago by Shulamit Geva (1979). She noted that the pottery of the last Iron Age level, Beth Shean IV (= P-7), bore close comparison to that of Megiddo III, generally considered to be a largely 7th-century BC Assyrian-period stratum. Geva concluded that it was Beth-Shean Upper V that was destroyed by Tiglath-pileser III in 732 BC, and that IV was a resettlement of the site under the Assyrians. While the objection might be raised that no Assyrian remains have been identified at the site (pp. 36 and 46, n. 9), it should be remembered that finds usually thought to be diagnostic of the Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods (such as 'Assyrian Palace Ware') are extremely rare in the north of Israel. And a presence during Assyrian times is supported by the find of a Pazuzu head, typical of 8th–6th century BC Mesopotamia, found out of context in the fill of a Hellenistic floor, which lies directly above Str. P-7 (pp. 517–518).

Mazar (1993, 222) originally found Geva's 732 BC date for the fall of Upper Stratum V 'preferable' to that of the earlier publisher of the site, Frances James, who placed it c. 800 BC. However in this volume (p. 36) Mazar rejects Geva's view as 'untenable, since most of the Level V pottery is from Iron IIA and cannot be dated to 732 BCE'. That is only true, of course, on the conventional high chronology. Two areas of Upper Stratum V also produced some finds of Iron IIB types. Though Mazar (p. 35) considers the possibility that they were intrusive, a different reading of the evidence would be simply that the fall of Beth-Shean V coincided with the period of transition between Iron IIA and IIB. Within a lower chronology of the kind suggested by the present reviewer the changes in

pottery from Iron IIA to IIB styles — often dated to c. 800 BC — could have been a result of the Assyrian conquests, c. 730–700 BC (James 2008, 173, n. 150). In this case Geva's view would be correct. The violent destruction of Beth-Shean Upper V/P-8 (p. 33), with its gateway burnt, would then mark the invasion of Tiglath-pileser III rather than the destruction of P-7 favoured by the excavators (p. 381).

Beth Shean IV/P-7 would then belong to the late 8th–7th centuries BC, when it is presently thought to have been uninhabited. If Str. P-7 was largely a 7th-century settlement — as strongly suggested by the pottery comparisons with Megiddo III — it may have continued in Neo-Babylonian times. And a few apparently Persian-period figurines have been taken to suggest that the Beth-Shean temples continued to be frequented as cult centres (p. 37). These, together with the 'meagre' remains of walls from the 'squatter' occupation of P-6 (p. 33) might suggest that the site was not completely uninhabited between the late 7th century and Hellenistic times. It is interesting to note that one of the reasons for rejecting the tradition (recorded in the late source George Syncellus) that Beth-Shean took its classical name, Scythopolis, from Scythian invaders met here by Pharaoh Psammetichus I in the late 7th century BC, was that the site was completely uninhabited at that date (Ivanchik 1999, 509–510). Present understanding is that the name came from Scythian mercenaries settled here in Ptolemaic times (pp. 37–38).

To the credit of the editor, alternative interpretations like those of Geva and Arubas are discussed, or even (in the latter case) published in the volume. Indeed, as one would expect from Amihai Mazar (heading a team of 35 other contributing scholars), this volume is a model of publication. The typography, editing and cross-referencing is excellent and the number of integrated pictures exemplary, with so many photographs that they are not indexed in the contents list. Typographical errors (such as the 'Iron IB' for 'Iron IIB' on p. 33) are rare. Differences of interpretation aside, there can be few quibbles with a superbly presented site report publishing such a monumental amount of research.

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DUGGAN, PATRICK BRIAN *Saluki — the Desert Hound and the English Travelers who Brought it to the West*. Jefferson NC: McFarland & Co Inc. ISBN 978-0-78643-407-7. Price: \$45

This is, perhaps, an unusual book to find reviewed in the *PEQ* but, as the period covered deals with the years when the PEF was most active in the Middle East, I think that it fits in well with the interests of our readership whether or not those interests include dogs.

The Saluki or Salugi is a native of Syria, Jordan and Egypt and has been used by Arab tribesmen for generations in the hunting of deer, gazelle, hyena, foxes and rabbits. Its speed and endurance under the harsh conditions of the Levant inevitably made it a favourite of the British hunting classes who found themselves billeted in the area during the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A quick glance at the index will give an idea of the interest and enthusiasm that these desert hounds generated: Lady Anne Blunt, Austen Layard, David George Hogarth, Gertrude Bell, Charles Leonard Woolley. Lord Kitchener and the Amherst family. The one exception appears to be T. E. Lawrence who was no dog lover and who was pursued by Florence Amherst to give details of his meetings with various Salukis