THE ANCHOR BIBLE DICTIONARY

VOLUME 1
A–C

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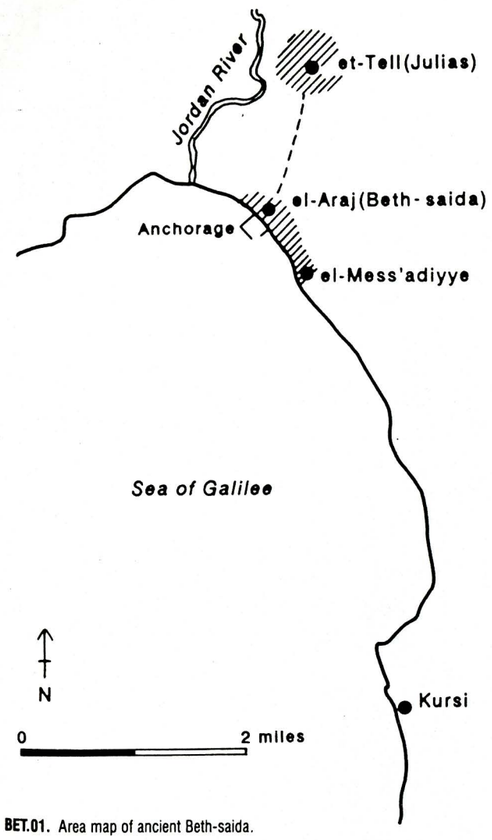

BET.01. Area map of ancient Beth-saida.

place nearby (Luke 9:25). Yet his ministry was evidently not well received, for Matthew 11:21 (cf. Luke 10:13) records his lament over the lack of repentence in Chorazin and Beth-saida.

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JAMES F. STRANGE

BETH-SHAN (PLACE) [Heb *bêt šan, bêt šĕʾān*]. Var. BETH-SHEAN; SCYTHOPOLIS. An ancient city standing sentinel over the junction of the Jezreel and Jordan valleys (M.R. 197212). The town was given to Manasseh (Josh 17:11), but that tribe was unable to secure the site because of the iron chariotry that the Canaanites had in their arsenal (Josh 17:16; Judg 1:27). It remained in non-Israelite control until after the reign of Saul, and it was at Beth-shan where Saul's decapitated body was put on display in the temple of Ashtaroth (1 Sam 31:10–12). During the reign of Solomon, however, it was listed as part of the administrative district belonging to Megiddo/Taʿanach (1 Kgs 4:12). The site is frequently mentioned in Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine times, when it became known as Scythopolis or Nysa Scythopolis. It was reported in the Maccabean conflicts as the scene of some confrontations (1 Macc 5:52; 12:40–42), and its inhabitants were spared massacre because of their hospitality to the local Jewish population (2 Macc 12:29–31). It then became the chief city of the DECAPOLIS, even though it was the only one on the W side of the Jordan river. During the Decapolis period the city expanded beyond the tell to its maximum area of almost 100 hectares, all of which was enclosed with a wall. The significance of Beth-shan is marked by the fact that the Islamic conquest of A.D. 636 was described by the victors as the "day of Beisan." The latter name, Beisan, derived from the ancient one ("house of Shan," Shan being possibly a deity worshiped at the site), continues to be used and now refers to a village SE of the tell.

A. Environmental Setting

Ancient Beth-shan (identified with Tell el-Husn) is strategically located in inland N Palestine where the Jezreel and Jordan valleys meet. The site is at the E terminus of the main route from the coast, the Via Maris, and roads branched out from there to Syria and Transjordan. Arable land, fish and other animal resources nearby, and a perennial water source (from the Wâdī Jalud, biblical Herod, on the S bank of which the site was founded) also encouraged human occupation. Consequently, Beth-shan was almost continuously settled from at least the Chalcolithic period up to modern times.

B. History of Excavations

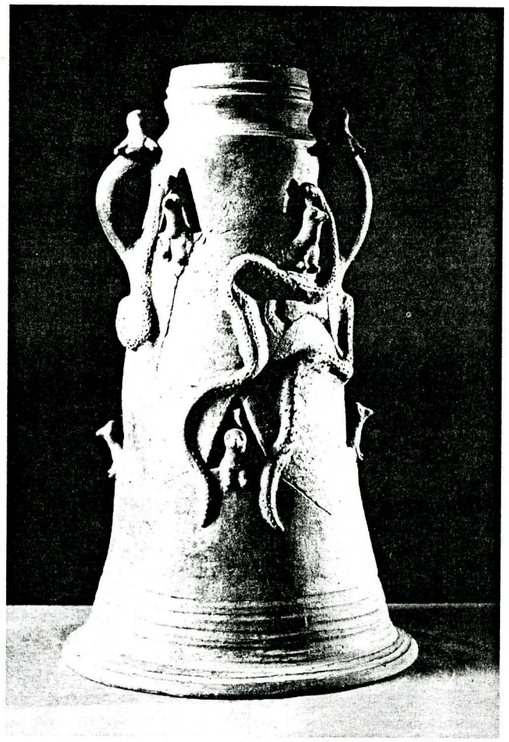
The tell of Beth-shan, including a large cemetery (the Northern Cemetery) on the N bank of the Wâdī Jalud, was excavated from 1921 to 1933, first under the direction of C. S. Fisher (1921–1923), then under A. Rowe (1925–1928) and G. M. FitzGerald (1930–1931, 1933). This undertaking was one of the large American archaeological expeditions after World War I, a period during which excavation techniques were still in their formative stages. Almost the whole of the top five levels of the highest point of the tell on the SE were cleared; and only by reworking the limited stratigraphic evidence and pottery data, based on current knowledge, can the archaeological sequence be reconstructed (see James 1966; Oren 1973). FitzGerald carried out a deep sounding on the citadel, penetrating to the basal levels, the areal extents of which were so limited that the results were very equivocal and as yet have not

phase, suggests that Egyptian power waned during the later Ramesside period.

Architecturally, level V, dated to Iron IC–IIA (ca. 1000–800 B.C.) according to the pottery evidence, represents a significant departure from the plan of the Egyptian garrison. Two long E-W buildings, one in the area of the level VIII–VI temple and another located farther N, have been identified as temples. This interpretation is well supported by the finds from the building's forecourt (a seated statue of Rameses III and monumental steles of Seti I and Rameses II dedicated to Ra-Hamarchis and Amun-Re) and by its interior (a stele dedicated to "Antit," probably the local equivalent of a principal Canaanite goddess). Indeed, the presence of the monumental steles and statue suggests that an imperial cult existed here that had its beginning in the LB (this area in levels VIII–VI was extensively disturbed, but wall lines are directly below those of the level V building). The steles describe in some detail the military defense of the Beth-shan area by the pharaohs against belligerent neighboring city-states and peoples (e.g., the *ʿapiru* [see HABIRU, HAPIRU]; possibly connected with the Hebrews). Since the historical data of the steles accord with other texts of the pharaohs, they most likely originated in their reigns and were moved up from one level to the next as buildings were successively renovated or rebuilt by the Egyptians. Like storehouses of the period, a double row of columns ran the length of the S building. Based on the biblical tradition (I Chr 10:10), Rowe denoted the building the "Temple of Dagon," the primary male deity of the Philistines; no inscriptions, however, were recovered from the building, and it is doubtful that the site was ever controlled by the Philistines. Both N and S temples yielded numerous cylindrical and house-like stands, which were decorated with snakes and birds and which were probably used in the cult. See Fig. BET.02. In the later phase of level V, a gate existed on the NW side of the tell, which was approached by a gentle earthen slope from the valley (earlier gates may have been located here as well). Unfortunately, the gate's overall plan is unclear, but its architectural and masonry style (interior buttresses, header-and-stretcher arrangement of ashlar blocks, and an attached double wall) is similar to that of other gates in N Israel (e.g., Megiddo and Hazor) fortified by Solomon (cf. 1 Kgs 9:15). It is uncertain how the site was taken by the Israelites.

After a possible hiatus in occupation, level IV was rebuilt along different architectural lines from level V. The very poorly preserved stratum is dated according to the pottery to ca. 800–600 B.C.

Another gap in settlement followed level IV, although late Iron Age and Persian period tombs were found by Tzori east of the tell. The site was reoccupied in the Hellenistic (363–332 B.C.) and Roman (63 B.C.–A.D. 324) periods—levels III and II. The Hellenistic structures were extensively disturbed by later Roman buildings, in particular by a large temple on the NW side of the tell (initially assigned to the Hellenistic period, but now dated to the 1st century A.D.). The Roman city spread into the valley below the tell, where a colonnaded street, a hippodrome, a villa with mosaic floors, a theater, and an extensive wall circuit (spanning the Wâdī Jalud) were uncovered. Roman tombs in the Northern Cemetery produced glass vessels, pottery



BET.02. Cylindrical stand with snakes and birds from Beth-shan—Level V. *(Courtesy of P. E. McGovern)*

figurines, and portrait busts of the dead; a stone sarcophagus in one tomb was inscribed with the name of Antiochus, son of Phallion, possibly a cousin of Herod the Great.

The uppermost level on the tell (level I) was dominated by a circular Byzantine church, with an ambulatory around an open court. FitzGerald dated the building to the early 5th century because of the similarity between its column capitals and those of the Church of St. Stephen in Jerusalem, which was constructed by the empress Eudocia between 431 and 438. A mosaic in the building was also comparable to one of approximately the same period in the Church of Eleona on the Mount of Olives. Domestic residences surrounded the church, and a paved road led from the latter to the NW gate. A monastery, dedicated to or sponsored by a certain Lady Mary, was constructed N of the cemetery on the opposite bank of the Wâdī Jalud, just outside the Byzantine city wall; inscriptions and a hoard of coins minted under Heraclius I indicate that it was constructed in the early 6th century A.D. and probably stood until the Islamic conquest. Extensive mosaic floors included circular representations of the Labors of the Months grouped around the personified sun and moon. In addition, four synagogues in the vicinity of the tell have

been reworked. More recent archaeological work on the tell and in its environs (e.g., Yadin and Geva 1984) has also helped to clarify the findings of the early expedition.

C. Archaeological Sequence

The earliest evidence for occupation on the tell at Beth-shan is represented only by pit deposits in the lowest level (XVIII; above virgin soil) of FitzGerald's deep sounding, which contained pottery dating to the Chalcolithic period (ca. 4500–3300 B.C.) or possibly to the terminal phase of the Neolithic period (Yarmukian). Many other Chalcolithic sites, however, were identified by N. Tzori in the immediate vicinity of the tell.

The Esdraelon culture, which has been identified as either a late Chalcolithic phase or an initial phase of the EB (ca. 3400–3100 B.C.), is attested by gray burnished and "grain wash ware" (i.e., pottery decorated with streaky red paint) from level XVI. Streets and multiroomed structures appeared in the immediately succeeding levels (XV–XI) of the deep sounding, encompassing the main period of urban expansion, down to ca. 2400 B.C. Khirbet Kerak pottery, a distinctive, highly burnished black and red ware with stylistic affinities to E Anatolian types, is very prevalent in level XI (although it was found in mixed contexts with MB material). This pottery is dated to a late phase of EB III and is possibly related to contemporaneous disruptions throughout the Near East that contributed to a weakening of the Palestinian city-state system.

The transitional EB IV period (ca. 2400–1950 B.C.), as elsewhere in Palestine, is primarily attested by shaft tombs in the Northern Cemetery; relatively little evidence for occupation was found on the tell. A reconsolidation of urban life, however, is evidenced by large houses with central courtyards in level X and by tombs with rich deposits (e.g., duckbill-shaped axheads and scarabs) both on the tell and in the Northern Cemetery. Although the stratigraphy of the deep sounding is problematic and has not been reworked, the artifactual material appears to cover most if not the entirety of MB I–III (ca. 1950–1550 B.C.).

Level IX, which also has not yet been reworked, dates primarily to the LB I period (ca. 1550–1400 B.C.); an admixture of earlier and later materials occurs in some contexts. Based on scarabs, Rowe assigned this stratum to Thutmose III, but scarabs of this pharaoh are poor chronological indicators since they continued to be made after his reign and were often retained as heirlooms. The architectural layout of the level on the acropolis is quite different from underlying level X, and included a large, open courtyard bordering a thick-walled rectangular building (possibly a *migdal*-type temple) and a complex of rooms with an altar to the E. A basalt relief showing a lion and dog in combat was a notable find; Palestinian artifacts predominated in the level, although some Egyptian-style artifacts were also recovered.

Egyptian presence was intensified in levels VII and VIII (dating to LB IIB, 13th century B.C., although previously assigned to the late 15th–14th centuries by Rowe on the basis of scarabs), in which the citadel was again laid out on along completely different architectural lines. The buildings (a so-called commandant's house with two large rooms along one side of the structure; a heavily bastioned *migdal;* a large silo; the SE sector with rooms and center hall buildings to either side of a N-S street; and, most significantly, a temple with a columned forecourt and a back altar room approached by a stairway) are analogous to specific Egyptian New Kingdom architectural types. The levels produced more Egyptian-style artifacts than any other LB site in Palestine: scarabs of 19th-Dyn. pharaohs, duck-head bowls, cobra figurines, zoomorphic stands, "flower pots," jewelry, etc., as well as inscriptions (e.g., a stele of Amenemopet the architect, dedicated to "Mekal, the god, the lord of Beth-shan"). The combined evidence leaves little doubt that the Egyptians restructured the site to be a military garrison along the N frontier of Palestine, from which they could protect their interests in the area and participate in trade with major empires to the N. Palestinian artifacts still predominated at the site, and many of the basic industries (pottery, silicates, metals, alabaster, boneworking, goldworking, etc.) continued to function as they had in the past. Nevertheless, as shown by scientific analyses, Egyptian-style artifacts were generally produced locally (one exception being glass and faience vessels); and Egyptian craftsmen must have been present at the site to manufacture such items or to tutor Palestinian craftsmen. A syncretistic Palestinian-Egyptian cult is implied by the representation of Egyptian deities (Hathor and minor gods, such as Bes, Taurt, and Sekhmet) and Palestinian deities (a principal female and male god).

Even though serious disruptions in the Palestinian city-state system occurred at the end of the LB (ca. 1200 B.C.), Beth-shan continued to be occupied by the Egyptians in the early Iron Age. No destruction level was noted between levels VII and VI. With minor refurbishing the level VI temple is identical to that of level VII and located directly above it, and the general layout of the SE sector is the same in both levels; only the commandant's house and *migdal* were totally dismantled, to be replaced by probable storehouses. Egyptian-style artifacts, including scarabs of later Ramesside pharaohs (in particular, Rameses III of the 12th century B.C.), numerous limestone door fragments from central-hall buildings with hieroglyphic inscriptions referring to the "commander of the troops" (Ramesseswe-serkhephesh) during the reign of Rameses III, and pottery and small objects similar to those in level VII are still very prevalent. A group of tombs in the Northern Cemetery contained large anthropoid coffins, several of which had grotesque faces and were shown wearing high head/hair-dresses. Because of the similarity of the latter with depictions of the SEA PEOPLES in Egyptian reliefs, it has been proposed that one or more groups of Sea Peoples (the Denyen, Tjekker, and/or Peleset [Philistines]) were resident at the site, perhaps as mercenaries. Although it is possible that some Sea Peoples lived there, their numbers must have been quite small, since very little characteristic artifactual material, such as is common at coastal sites, has been found at the site (only one Philistine shard was recovered from the site). Earlier and later phases of level VI (lower and upper, respectively) broadly date to ca. 1200–1000 B.C. The inscriptional evidence from lower level VI indicates that Rameses III was primarily responsible for consolidating Egyptian control at the site. The possibility of a destruction layer between lower and upper level VI, as well as the sparse remains from the latter

been investigated. Near the Monastery of Lady Mary and dating from the 5th through the early 7th century, one synagogue contained mosaics with representations of the ark of the covenant covered by a curtain, ritual vessels, and a seven-branched candelabra, together with four inscriptions (three Greek and one Samaritan). Nearby, the mosaics in a second synagogue of the 6th century also showed ritual vessels and a candelabra, and included Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic inscriptions. At Farwana (probably ancient Rehob), S of Beth-shan and dating from the 5th–7th centuries, was discovered the longest Hebrew mosaic inscription, detailing halakic laws of the Sabbatical Year and tithing. Byzantine houses, another monastery, and a potter's workshop were also located in the vicinity of the tell. Numerous tombs from the Byzantine period were excavated in the Northern Cemetery.

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BETH-SHEAN. An alternate spelling for BETH-SHAN.

BETH-SHEARIM (PLACE). See BURIALS (ANCIENT JEWISH).

BETH-SHEMESH (PLACE) [Heb *bêt šemeš, ʿîr šemeš*]. The RSV has three towns with this name and the Heb MT has another.

1. A town located in the NE Shephelah (M.R. 147128) in the Valley of Sorek and which played a small but significant role in Israel's history. It was occupied throughout the biblical period and, as a border town, experienced the varying fortunes of the tribe and kingdom of Judah.

a. Biblical References. Beth-shemesh is mentioned in two geographical lists of Joshua: first as Ir-shemesh (Josh 19:41) within the territory of Dan, and then (Josh 21:16) as Beth-shemesh, a town given by the tribe of Judah to the Kohathite sons of Aaron. However, Beth-shemesh is not mentioned as a town of Judah in the geographical list of Joshua 15. The question of whether Beth-shemesh belonged to the tribe of Judah or Dan may be answered by reference to Dan's 11th-century migration to its N territory, which would have left Beth-shemesh on the NW border of Judah. An equally plausible, though more technical, explanation concerns the second Solomonic administrative district (1 Kgs 4:9), which appears to parallel the territory mentioned in Josh 19:41. The Joshua passage may be a description of 10th-century rather than of 11th- or of 12th-century geography, irrespective of tribal designations.

Beth-shemesh plays a prominent role in the story of the Philistine capture of the ark of the covenant (1 Sam 6:9–15). The ark is carried from Philistine territory to Beth-shemesh, which was a border town just inside Israelite territory.

With the division of the kingdom, Beth-shemesh fell within the borders of Judah. Jehoash of Israel and Amaziah of Judah engaged in a battle at Beth-shemesh in which Jehoash proved the victor (2 Kgs 14:11; 2 Chr 25:21). Not only does this battle emphasize the location of Beth-shemesh as a border town, but the subsequent sacking of Jerusalem by Jehoash also indicates that Beth-shemesh had guarded the Sorek pass from the Philistine plain to Jerusalem. Beth-shemesh later passed from Israelite control when the Philistines captured it during the reign of Ahaz (2 Chr 28:18).

The only other ancient sources to mention Beth-shemesh are the Palestinian Talmud in a geographical context (*Meg.* 1.70a and parallel passages) and Eusebius (*Onomast.*