

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

1. The work of excavation at Tell el Hesya, the ancient city of Lachish, was the fruit of a permission which the Palestine Exploration Fund had long been endeavouring to obtain from the Turkish government. The first idea was to explore Umm Lakis and Khurbet Ajlan, two sites which were supposed to be Lachish and Eglon; but happily the area asked for included some other ancient sites, and among them Tell el Hesya. I left Egypt and arrived in Syria in March, 1890. On going to Jerusalem, I found that the permission granted by the government had been delayed owing to a verbal error. I was thus detained for three weeks, during which time I carefully examined the remains at Jerusalem with Prof. Hayter Lewis, Dr. Chaplin and Herr Schick, each of whom are authorities on their own subjects there. I also measured most of the rock tombs about Jerusalem; and made an apparently successful essay to recover the cubits of the excavators, by an examination of the measurements on the principles worked out in 1877 in my "Inductive Metrology." The results of this work will shortly appear.

2. Having at last obtained the permission, and seen His Excellency Reshid Pasha, I went down to the village of Bureir, the nearest inhabited place to my area of work. After waiting for ten days more, at last the needful Turkish official arrived to watch the excavations, and to take for the government all antiquities that might be found. I began work on Umm Lakis, about three miles from Bureir. But three days' work there were amply enough to prove its late date, as I had supposed at my first view of it. It is strewn with rough rounded stones, the remains of rude walls. The soil is from 4 to 8 feet deep; all organic mould and humus, without any ancient consolidated stuff. Roman pottery was found throughout it, and a coin of Maximian Hercules about 300 A.D., at only

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2 feet above the native clay. At a little distance to the north, on a rise, we cleared part of a building of concrete and small stones; which, from the large bath in it, seemed to be a Roman villa. I therefore settled that no reasonable prospect of anything important could be seen here.

3. I had, while waiting at Bureir, gone over the district allotted to me, and seen each of the ancient sites. Khurbet Ajlan seemed far more unpromising than Umm Lakis; only a few stray scraps of late pottery lie strewn about, and there does not seem to be any depth of soil. But Tell el Hesya from its height, and the pre-Greek style of its pottery, seemed to me to be a very promising site; and I settled on attacking it, although it was in the midst of the Bedawin, and mostly cultivated. The Turkish official was here of use, in doing all the communications with the innumerable Bedawi Shekhs and visitors who came about, and so relieving me of much attention to them. I had six weeks of work there, including the whole of the month of Ramadan, when work is very difficult to the fasting and thirsty Muslims. But in that time, and without disturbing the crops, I succeeded in unravelling the history of the place, and obtaining a long series of pottery approximately dated. It was well that I had not reckoned on continuing my work longer, for at the last all my men deserted me to go to harvest, and I could not get one even to guard my tents.

4. I had usually about thirty men employed, each with a woman or girl to carry the basket. But only a small proportion of the natives there are fit for work; each group of men that I engaged rapidly dwindled down by weeding out the hopelessly lazy ones; so that in two or three weeks half of any lot would be dismissed, and in six weeks but an eighth of the original party remained, all the rest having come in later. At first it seemed as if watching them made no difference; if away one never saw them doing anything, and when there one always saw them doing nothing; that was the only variation. But gradually by steady weeding, and by regular work, the average quality improved; and at last there were some tolerably good workers among them. The Bedawin were troublesome, though not actually quarrelling. Some of the head shekhs appeared civil enough, and as far reasonable as such folks can be. But the common herd were always in mischief; lounging about the excava-

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tions, carrying away things that were found, overthrowing any masonry, driving off the workmen's donkeys while out grazing, worrying about supposed injuries to crops, and generally being about as much in the way as they could. It would have been a treat to have made them do a hard honest day's work ; for nothing is more annoying than a pack of ne'er-do-weel, quarrelsome, loungers insisting on hanging about. No villager dare say a word to them, or object to anything they did, for fear of the ever-present sword and pistols, which they were only too ready to flourish about. What with needing to be always conciliatory to the Turkish official, and to the Bedawin shekhs, and yet never allowing anyone to obtain any authority over the men or the work, the course of an excavator is not of the easiest.

After closing the work, as I did not see a prospect of doing more without much greater expense and time, I then went to examine several important sites in Judaea. Ed Dhaheriyeh, Hebron, Beit Jibrin, and so to Jaffa, being my route. I thus found some very promising sites for work, where early towns lie exposed, as seen by the style of the pottery strewn about.

Various friends rendered much assistance to my arrangements in Palestine. Besides advice from Dr. Chaplin's intimate knowledge of the country, and from Herr Schick's long experience at Jerusalem, I also learned much from my old friend the Revd. J. Longley Hall, of Jaffa, whose constant visiting about Palestine renders his information very practical ; and Dr. Elliott, who has a large work in the medical mission at Gaza, also was most cordial. The principal difficulties of excavating in Syria arise from the insecurity of the country, and the tenacity of a weak government.

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CHAPTER II.

SITE OF TELL EL HESY.

5. The mound of Tell el Hesya stands 16 miles east of Gaza, a little to the north : that is rather more than half way from Gaza to Beit Jibrin, and a third of the distance from Gaza to Jerusalem. Though in the bottom of a valley, yet its height of over 100 feet makes it a conspicuous mark, both from the hill country—when looking over the wide plain of Philistia,—and also in the view up the broad Wady Hesya from the west. This mound, for over 60 feet of its height, consists of successive ruins of towns piled one on the other. The houses were built of sun-dried clay bricks ; every storm washed down somewhat from the walls, and deposited the mud around the houses ; every house that was ruined was partially broken down and helped to fill up the surrounding space ; every gust of wind left some dust in the streets ; and little by little the surface was thus raised, about half an inch each year, until, instead of a low swelling ground 50 or 60 feet above the stream at its foot, the mound when it was last occupied rose over 120 feet from the water. This gradual piling up of a mound of ruins is well known in Egypt, where sun-dried mud bricks were also used ; the mound of ruins of Damanhur is over 40 feet high, and the mound of Tanis is as much as 80 feet.

The stream of the Wady Hesya—or rather its branch the Wady Muleihah, which joins it here—is a torrent during the winter rains, though about dried up in summer ; it runs past the east side of the mound, and since the time when the town was built it has eaten its way further into the soil of its western bank, undermining the ruins, and thus leaving a steep cliff, sloping down at about 45° in irregular ledges from the top edge to the stream below. The other sides of the mound are less steep ; the north and south are rather below the angle of rest, and on the west the mound slopes gently down to the natural ridge on which it stands. The surrounding soil and the top of the mound are now

Site of Tell el Hesya.

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cultivated by the Bedawin; and it is only on its steeper sides that excavations can be made without the need of buying out the crops, and of restoring the surface of the land for cultivation.

6. The hill of ruins is about 200 feet each way (Pl. I); it stands in the north-east corner of an enclosure nearly quarter of a mile across. The bank around this will be seen from the plan to skilfully occupy the natural crests of the ground, between the small drainage valleys; on the southern side the ridge is yet 7 feet high of artificial stuff, banked up on the highest edge of the ground; on the western side the space is marked partly by a ridge, partly by the steep edge of a plateau; and on the northern side there is a sharp edge to the plateau, with the foundations of a brick wall which originally defended it on this side. The nature of the soil greatly aggravates the scouring action of the rainfall, as it is a deep bed of sand with a cap of clay on the top of it; hence the rain cannot penetrate the ground gently, but is shed off to the watercourse which has already cut through into the soft sand, and it rapidly deepens and lengthens that channel. The small watercourses are, therefore, here about 10 feet below the surface of the soil around, between walls of soft sand; and this accounts for the strangely furrowed state of the ground, the steep slopes of the little valleys, and the marked importance of what would otherwise be insignificant drainage lines.

Within the area thus enclosed there is no great depth of remains, except on the mound; on an average only about 4 feet of humus and artificial soil overlie the native clay, in some parts only one foot, and nowhere more than 10 feet. The depth of soil is marked in feet on the plan wherever it was tested. In the northern parts some pottery is found, and it appears that the earliest town extended along the northern side; perhaps before the restriction of walls and fortifications built to defend the place, as the pottery is like that of the earliest part of the mound. No late pottery was found in this enclosure, and it only seems to have been used during the earlier history. Probably it was intended for a refuge for the country people and their herds, during the invasions of foreigners.

CHAPTER III.

REMAINS AT TELL EL HESYA.

7. We will now turn to the remains of the town. First it must be said that there is not any inscription, nor have any accurately dateable objects been found, which would give a precise age for any of the lower levels of the mound: we must therefore proceed by less direct methods. Happily no Roman pottery or remains occur anywhere on the mound, and I only saw one chip of Roman pottery in the enclosure, accidentally dropped there; the same may be said of the Seleucidan and Ptolemaic ages which have not left any remains here. The latest objects found are pieces of regular black and red Greek pottery, which occur in the top foot or two of the mound, on the east side and north-west; the most dateable of these is a part of a small vase, made about 450 B.C., and none of the other fragments indicate a later age than this. The close of the history of this place is then in the fifth century B.C. And as only a few fragments of this age are found, and those confined to less than half of the town, it seems that this last occupation was but partial and not of much importance. If then the top of the mound is of 450 B.C., how far before that are we to date the bottom of the 60 feet of ruins beneath us? Unfortunately no Egyptian objects were found which would give us a fixed point; and the only help we can get in estimating what must have been a long period, is in the Phoenician pottery. Not much of this occurs in the mound; but as many vases were found associated together in burials outside of the town we know all the contemporary varieties, and can help our dating by each of them. The thin black vases with long necks (called *bilbils* by the Syrians) occur from about 305 feet level up to 325 feet on the east side, about the pilaster building; the black bowls, which we know to be contemporary with the *bilbils*, occur from 295 feet at the S.E. to 315 feet at the pilaster building; the white juglets and the ladder-pattern bowls, both of which are also contemporary with *bilbils*, have just the same

Remains at Tell el Hesya.

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range. So we may assign the Phoenician pottery to from 295 to 320 feet, at the middle of the east side. Now this pottery is not yet dated in Phoenicia, but in the past two years I have found it in Egypt; the earliest examples being late in the XVIIIth dynasty, about 1400 B.C.; the greatest number about the close of the XIXth dynasty, or 1100 B.C.; and some as late as about the XXIIIrd dynasty, or say 800 B.C. So the date of this Phoenician pottery may be roughly said to range from about 800 to 1400 B.C.

8. The problem then reads thus. The top level is of 450 B.C., the middle period of the Phoenician is about 1100 B.C.; and the middle of the Phoenician levels is at $307\frac{1}{2}$, or $32\frac{1}{2}$ feet under the top. If $32\frac{1}{2}$ feet corresponded then to 650 years, this gives just 5 feet per century as the rate of average accumulation. Applying this scale we find that about the region of the pilaster building the dates should be,—

Top of mound	...	...	...	340 feet =	450 B.C.
Latest Phoenician	...	...	...	320 „ =	850 B.C.
Earliest „	...	...	...	295 „ =	1350 B.C.
Earliest dwellings	...	...	...	278 „ =	1670 B.C.*

We therefore see that not only is this scale fixed by the middle point of the Phoenician, but the extent of the range of the Phoenician period according to the mound is just in accord with the duration of it in Egyptian remains. No doubt there were irregularities in the rate of accumulation; the captivity of the Jews, the desolation of the Canaanite towns after the ravages of the nomadic Israelite invaders, and such causes, would make a much slower rate of accumulation in some centuries than in others; but yet the scale cannot be so far wrong as to land us in a wholly different period to the truth, as we have it fairly fixed by three points,—the Greek pottery, and the beginning and end of the Phoenician.

* This scale is concordant with the rate of accumulation of the Egyptian towns of the Delta which have risen about 3 to 4 feet per century; with the greater rainfall of Syria therefore 5 feet per century is a very probable rate of deposit, as the walls would be destroyed more quickly.

9. Can we then see any other historical clues in the remains? I think we fairly may. The most prominent stage in the history of the town is pointed out by the widespread beds of ashes (see section of east face, Pl. III) and the underlying stratum of stream-bed stones. These ashes were certainly spread by the wind. Alternate layers of black charcoal dust and white lime ash streak the face of the mound for a depth of about 5 feet; and the lines are always unbroken and continuous, often a streak not over half an inch thick being traceable for 10 or 20 feet, and gradually thinning out at the ends. No deposit by hands could effect this, the stuff must have been wind borne, and dropped by the breeze without interference. The source of these ashes was doubtless the burning of plants for alkali, as is now done by the Bedawin. This custom has led to the heaping up of large piles of the lime, and insoluble substances remaining after lixiviation, near the north side of Jerusalem. At Tell el Hesya the charcoal layers were the result of the sparks and dust of the burning, and the breaking up of the fires; while the white lime layers were the dust blown about after the lixiviation had washed away the alkali. The town must then have been deserted, or almost so, at the time when the alkali burners resorted here, and when their ashes blew about and settled undisturbed over a great part of the hill.

Beneath these ash layers there is a stratum of rounded stones from the stream; showing a time when no regular brickwork was used, but when huts were roughly piled up out of the nearest material; a barbaric period followed by a desolation. The level of this time is from about 298 to 308 feet; which would on our approximate scale correspond to 1300 to 1100 B.C. Of course we cannot say that these stones and ashes accumulated at the same rate as the town ruins did before and after them, though probably the rate would not be extremely different. Hence we cannot be certain of the duration of this barbarism, but only of its general period, about 1200 B.C.

10. Now this we see just corresponds to the great break in the history of Palestine, between the destruction of the Amorite civilization, and the establishment of Jewish civilization under the Kings. The period of the Judges was a terribly barbaric age; its fragmentary records speak of savage retaliations, and the fierce struggles of disorganized tribes.

Remains at Tell el Hesya.

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Judge after judge rises out of a mist of warfare, only to disappear and leave a confusion as black as before. Ehud, Barak, Gideon, Gaal, Abimelech, Jephthah, Samson, with their bloody record, lead up to the hideous tragedy of the slaughter of Benjamin. Not a trace of peaceful arts do we find; not even the arts of civilized warfare, in the making of weapons. Deborah sings "Was there a shield or a spear seen among forty thousand in Israel?"; Ehud made his own dagger, not having one, nor apparently able to get one otherwise; Shamgar slew the Philistines with an ox-goad; "there was no smith found throughout all the land of Israel," so that "there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people that were with Saul"; and even as late as David the Hebrew warfare was so rude that the rich booty of a thousand chariots was nearly all destroyed, as being useless, only reserving a hundred. The invasion of the nomad horde of Israelites on the high civilization of the Amorite kings—such as we see it shown on the Egyptian monuments—must have seemed a crushing blow to all culture and advance in the arts; it was much like the terrible breaking up of the Roman Empire by the northern races, it swept away nearly all the good along with the evil; centuries were needed to regain what was lost, along with the further gain of a better moral order than that which had been destroyed. That the Amorite cities were almost deserted, and that rude huts of the stones of the stream stood in the place of brick and stone work, is just in accord with the history; and the wind-swept desolation of the alkali burners' ground, shows when even the barbarous dwellers had left the place.

11. We can now gain a further standpoint in the history of Tell el Hesya, by looking at the series of town walls shown on the northern side in the section. We there see that the stratum of stones which we have just found to represent the age of the Judges, divides the series of successive walls, at the level of 286 to 291 feet. The massive walls which lie below this we must accordingly date to the Amorite times, while those which stand above it must belong to the age of the Jewish Kingdom. Having now shown on what grounds we can succeed in settling the chronology of this site, we will next consider its identification, and then the historical results to be drawn.

CHAPTER IV.

IDENTIFICATION OF LACHISH.

12. As no inscriptions have been found here we can only rely on literary remains for discovering the name of the site. This city was one of the most important places in the low country, or Shephelah. No settlement so large and so ancient is to be seen for a long distance around it; excepting Tell Nejileh, $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles to the south, in the same valley. The reason for these places having been so early settled, and so strongly held, is evident in the nature of the country. Here alone are natural springs, no others existing in all the neighbourhood; nor, so far as I have seen, are there any nearer than the "upper and nether springs" of Caleb some 19 miles off in the Hebron mountains. In a country where deep wells, over a hundred feet in many cases, are the only constant source of water, the possession of springs is as much coveted as it was by the bride of Othniel. To hold the springs means life for the flocks and herds, and the interposing of a serious difficulty for any intruder who might try to occupy the thirsty land around. To the present time thousands of animals are watered here daily, and there are far more Bedawin camps within easy reach of this water than in any equal patch of country. Springs also rise at Tell Nejileh, and a massive dam of concrete has at one time retained their water as a lake at the foot of the tell. This must have been an early work, as that place does not appear to have been occupied since the invasion of Nebuchadrezzar, or perhaps that of Sennacherib. Another great concrete dam lies across the Wady Hesya close to the tell, to retain the rainfall coming down from the eastern branch, or Wady Jizair, showing that even more water than that of the springs was needed here.

13. We therefore see both from the natural features, and from the great Amorite fortification, that this site of Tell el Hesya was probably the most important in the whole district, and Tell Nejileh only second to it.