sentinel over the junction of the Jerzeel and Jordan valleys (M.R. 1972:2). The town was given to Manasseh (Josh 17:11), but that tribe was unable to secure the site because of the iron chariots 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/Rehob (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 5:50; 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, 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. 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
B. History of Excavations
C. Archaeological Sequence

A. Environmental Setting
Ancient Beth-shan (identified with Tell el-Husn) is strategically located inland in N Palestine where the Jerzeel 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 Wadi Jezul, 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 Wadi Jezul, was excavated from 1921 to 1923, first under the direction of C. S. Fisher (1921–1925), then under A. Rowe (1925–1926) 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 stage. 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 stratiographic 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
BETH-SHAN

BETH-SHAN has been remarked. 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 of Egyptian-style artifacts on the tell at Beth-Shan is represented only by pit deposits in the lowest levels (tell levels IV and III). The fitzgerald dating of the Late Bronze/Early Iron Age, which contained pottery dating to the Chalcolithic period (ca. 4500-3500 B.C.) or possibly to the terminal phase of the Neolithic period (ca. 7000 B.C.). Many other Chalcolithic sites, however, were identified by N. Titori in the immediate vicinity of the tell.

The Edomite 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 grey burnished and "grain wash" (i.e., pottery decorated with streaky red paints) 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 sinuous 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 disappearances throughout the Near East that contributed to a weakening of the Palestinian city-state system.

The transitional EB IV period (ca. 2400-1500 B.C.) occurs as elsewhere in Palestine, is primarily attested by shaft tombs in the Beth-Shan Cemetery; relatively little evidence for occupation was found on the tell itself, with the exception 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 axes and scabrous) both on the tell and in the Northern Cemetery. Although the stratigraphy of the deep sounding is problematic and has not been reworked, the artificial material appears to cover most if not the entirety of MB I-II (ca. 1550-1500 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, which may be partially attributed to the destruction of this stratum. Thutmose III, but scarabs of this pharaoh are poor chronologically 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 er from the destruction of level X, and included a large, open courtyard surrounded by a thin-walled rectangular building (possibly a mud-brick temple) and a complex of rooms with an altar to the E. A board relief showing a lion and dog in combat was a notable find; Palestinian artifacts predominated in the level, although some Egyptian-style artifacts occurred.

Egyptian presence was intensified in levels VII and VIII (dating to LB III and LB II, respectively) (ca. 1350 B.C.), although previously assigned to the late 15th-14th centuries by Rowan on the basis of scarabs, in which the altar was again laid out along an axis parallel to the E wall. The building (using the same commandant's house with two large rooms along one side of the structure; a heavilybastioned mud-brick rampart). 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 hall (altar room approached by a stairway) are analogous to specific Egyptian New Kingdom architectural types. The levels produced a more Egyptian-style artifacts than any other LB site in Palestine: scarabs of 19th-Dyn. pharaohs, duck-bill-shaped axes, and a number of Egyptian objects of the type known as "bowel pots," jewelry, etc., as well as inscriptions (e.g., a stele of Amenemopet the architect, dedicated to "Mekal, the god, worker of the city") that 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 syncretic Palestinian-Egyptian cult is implied by the representation of Egyptian deities (Hathor and minor gods, such as Bes, Taum, 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; the EB IV temple is the same in both levels; only the commandant's house and mud-brick walls were totally destroyed, to be replaced by probable storehouses. Egyptian-style artifacts, including scarabs of later Rameside pharaohs (in particular, Rameses III of the 12th century B.C.), were found in the central hall buildings with hieroglyphic inscriptions referring to the "commander of the troops" (Rameseses-erikhephes) during the reigns of Rameses III and pottery and small objects similar to those in level VII are still very abundant. The Northern Cemetery contained large anthropoid coffins, some with hieroglyphic inscriptions and grotesque faces and were shown wearing head/hair/dresses. Because of the simultaneous presences of the SE PAE PEOPLE in Egyptian rituals, it has been proposed that one or more groups of Sea Peoples (the Danayan, Tidiane? Phoenicians?) could have been responsible for the destruction of the site, perhaps as mercenaries. Although it is possible that a group of Sea Peoples must have been quite small, since very little characteristic artificial material, such as common at coastal sites, has been found in the level VI destruction layer (not recovered from the site). Earlier and later phases of level VI (loosely identified with the 13th and 12th centuries B.C.) and the remains of a building (a so-called commandant's house with two large rooms along one side of the structure; a heavily bastioned mud-brick rampart).
BETH-SHAN

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 candelabrum, 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 candelabrum, 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 halicak laws of the Sabbathical Year and tithe. 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.

Bibliography


Patrick E. McGovern

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

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

BETH-SHEMESHEM (PLACE) [Heb bêt Semesh,Šîr Semesh]. 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-sheameshem is mentioned in two geographical lists of Joshua: first as Ir-sheameshem (Josh 19:41) within the territory of Dan, and then (Josh 21:16) as Beth-sheameshem, a town given by the tribe of Judah to the Kohathite sons of Aaron. However, Beth-sheameshem is not mentioned as a town of Judah in the geographical list of Joshua 15. The question of whether Beth-sheameshem 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-sheameshem 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-sheameshem 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-sheameshem, which was a border town just inside Israelite territory.

With the division of the kingdom, Beth-sheameshem fell within the borders of Judah. Jehoash of Israel and Amaziah of Judah engaged in a battle at Beth-sheameshem in which Jehoash proved the victor (2 Kgs 14:11; 2 Chr 25:21). Not only does this battle emphasize the location of Beth-sheameshem as a border town, but the subsequent sacking of Jerusalem by Jehoash also indicates that Beth-sheameshem had guarded the Sorek pass from the Philistine plain to Jerusalem. Beth-sheameshem 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-sheameshem are the Palestinian Talmud in a geographical context (Meg. 1.70a and parallel passages) and Eusebius (Onomast.