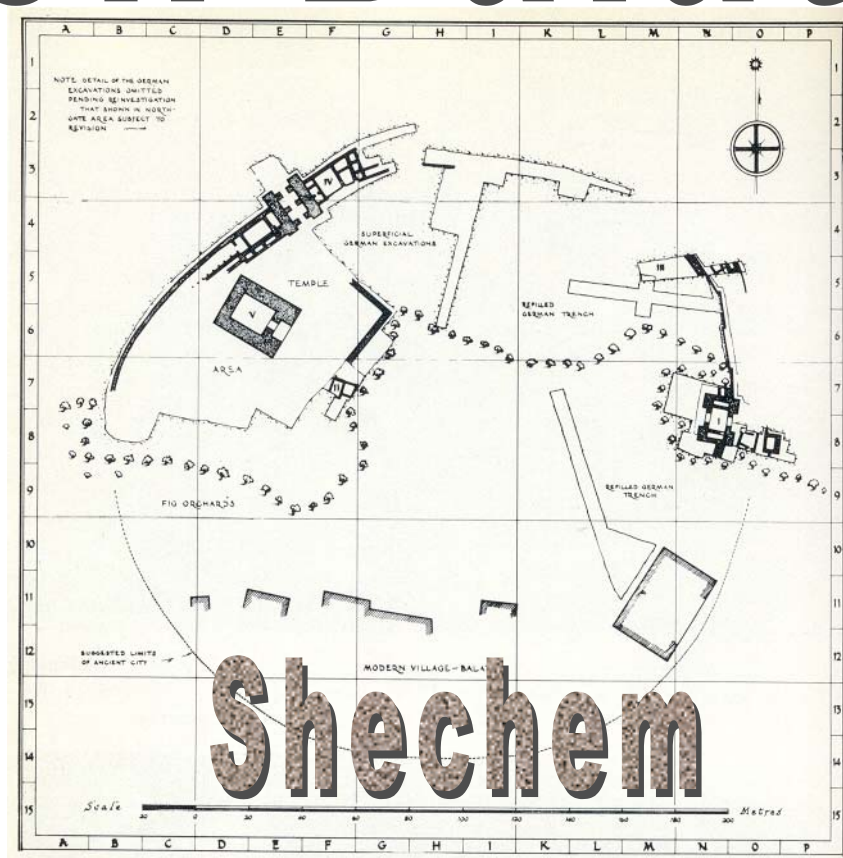


Tell Balatah



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ARCHAEOLOGICAL TIMELINE

(1) German Society for Scientific Research:

- Ernst Sellin & Carl Watzinger (1913-14, 1926-27)
- G. Welter (1928, 1932)
- H. Steckeweh (1934)

(2) Drew-McCormick-Harvard Expedition:

- George E. Wright, Lawrence E. Toombs, & Edward F. Campbell (1956-57, 1960, 1962, 1964, 1966, 1968-69)

The ancient Canaanite and Israelite city of Shechem is located on the west side of the



Jordan River between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. This area is very fertile and has an abundant water supply. The name Shechem means “shoulder” or “back” which represents strength as it relates to its demarcation as a city of refuge and also fits its description in respect to its location between Mount Ebal and Gerizim. Shechem has been identified with the Tell known as al-Balata, approximately 1 mile east of modern day Nablus. Nablus was built on the ruins of Shechem during 1st Century AD. Tell Balatah is located some 20 meters above the plateau of Askar, which puts it approximately 525 meters above sea level.

Shechem was a major trade center for the

surrounding region producing grapes, olives, wheat and livestock.

After being destroyed in 722 B.C. by the Assyrians, the city was rebuilt in 350 B.C. and became the religious center for the Samaritans. The city’s final destruction is thought to have come in 197 B.C. It is very likely the Shechem was one of the oldest settlements in and around the area of Canaan.

Some of the more recent work in Shechem has given us more evidence of a Greek influence. Such things as black-figure pottery were discovered and are thought to have originated before 500 B.C. Also, there have been coins discovered from all five Ptolemaic's (rulers), which give evidence to the occupation of the area during the 3rd and 2nd centuries B.C. There was also a Jug found that held a large amount of coins, all of which were said to have been silver tetradrachmn's.

One report from the excavation reads as follows: "One of Ptolemy I, sixteen, and probably three more, of Ptolemy III , two of Ptolemy IV; four, and probably eight more, of Ptolemy V. Two of the Ptolemy V coins



were dated: one in 198 B.C. and the other in 193 B.C." However, the latest remains of the twenty-four occupational strata's is that of the late Hellenistic period. These occupational layers are said to represent settlements from the Chalcolihic period of 3300 to the Hellenistic Period as late as 28 B.C.

Shechem did not have the natural defenses that many cities had and needed for protection at that time, and in turn required a heavy man-made fortification system. These are said to have been the best examples of Canaanite defense in Palestine.

Excavations of this area have given us much evidence supporting the understanding that the town was already in existence during the Patriarchal period.

God had promised Abraham this land early on in the biblical account and as promised Jacob had returned with his family to settle here. Also, this was the area that the twelve tribes of Israel discussed the consequences of obedience and disobedience of God's Law. Along with Abraham's tie to this area, it is also well known for being the location of the following: Jacob's well, the Tomb of Joseph, the location of the Middle Bronze Wall, the Scene of Dinah's rape, the location of the Middle Bronze Gate, the place where the ten tribes reject Rehoboam, the location of the Temple of Baal Berith, the place where Jacob's sons were tending the sheep before Joseph found them in Dothan, as well as the city which was set aside as a levitical city and a city of refuge.

One very memorable account we have in the Word of God is that of the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. Although some have suggested that New Testament Sychar is not Old Testament Shechem, I will take the understanding of the majority until otherwise proven differently. Located in the center of Shechem is the well known as "Jacob's Well". In chapter 4 of John's Gospel we come to the place where Jesus had compassion on the Samaritan women. At the site today are the ruins of two churches and the beginning construction of a third, which was never completed due to the Communist revolution 1917.

This site has been excavated by many, including an Austrian (1913-14), a German (1926-32) and an American (1957). Not much attention was paid to this area until the Austrian, Ernst Sellin, was attracted to the site upon the discovery of a bronze stockpile during the construction of Balatah. Tell Balatah was finally certified as being Shechem

by Professor Hermann Thiersch in 1932 when he accepted the beliefs of Sellin as to the existence of the temple. It was also magnified upon the discovery of the great fortifications, which as was mentioned earlier, was needed due to its lack of natural defenses.

Professor Sellin made many discoveries in the area. However, due to his inexperience in the area of archeological techniques, much of his work needed to be re-classified.

Professor Sellin was replaced by the German Archeologist G. Welter. Welter was in direct disagreement with Sellin as to the belief that Batatah was Shechem. Welter was not on the scene very long, when Sellin was reinstated as the Director of Theology on the project. Many years of troubles followed, which made it difficult to acquire any new data about the area.

The work at Shechem was not reopened until 1954. From 1954 to 1968 the project was directed by a host of people, and was utilized as a training center for biblical archeologists, which was thought to have been very successful.

Some remains that have been recovered from Tell Balatah include such things as a defensive wall, a large beaten-earth platform, a cylinder seal impression from the time of the Egyptian 12th Dynasty, the stairway leading to temple of Zeus built by Emperor Hadrian, as well as many more.

A few finds that we will discuss in short detail include the Middle Bronze Wall and the Middle Bronze Gate respectively with more time being spent on the Temple of Baal Berith.

As previously mentioned, due to the lack of natural defenses Shechem was a very vulnerable city. And with the wall to the left, there was an attempt to fortify the city.



The wall, which lasted well through the end of the Bronze Age, was built using Cyclopean stones.

There were four successive walls built around the city at different periods of time. The walls that can still be viewed today are those of the third

construction. In the background of this picture we see a view of Mt. Gerizim. This was the location of the Samaritan temple, which had been erected during the second century and utilized into the fourth century.

Another part of the city's man-made defenses were the triple-chamber gates with their enormous towers, located on each side, which are said to have emptied out into the main street of the city. Again, this construction of the city's entrances were built with security



measures in mind. To the left is a typical construction of a two-chamber gate system. It was built using three piers in order to strengthen the structure, which would have been found on the east side of the city wall. It is also believed that

there would have been a similar one on the southeast wall. However, it is not visible today. This type of gate was likely used during Jacob era and was probably used in the city during the days of Abimelech.

The Temple of a Baal Berith mentioned in Judges chapter 9, is said to have had walls that



were 17 feet thick, 26.8 meters long and 24.2 meters wide. With only one entrance, it is even more extensively fortified than the city itself. It proved so, as it was the area that the citizens of the city took refuge in against Abimelech's

attack. Archaeologists believe that studies show the building was two stories tall due to a stairwell found in the eastern tower. The construction of both a fortress and a temple is the most impressive Canaanite temple surviving in Palestine today. Dr. Sellin clearly describes the importance of this find as he concluded his work by stating the following:

Every student of the Bible knows that the Temple of Shechem, “The house of the covenant of God,” had a great importance for the Canaanites and, also for the history of Israel. It is known that it was destroyed by King Abimelech of Manasseh. Hence, the discovery of this temple is, in spite of some missing evidence, of the utmost importance, since it is, except for the smaller one of Besan (Beth-shan), the first Canaanite temple so far recovered.¹

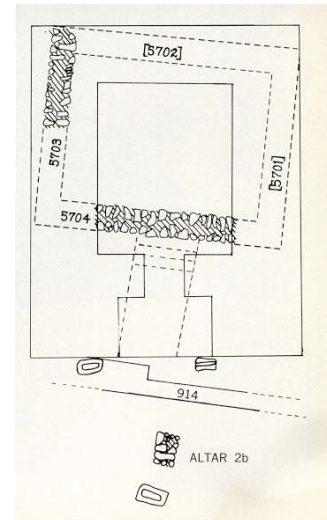
This Fortress-Temple is the largest of its kind in Palestine, with an exterior measurement of 86 feet 3 ½ inches long by 69 feet 6 ½ inches wide.



¹ ZDPV 49, 1926, pp. 304-320. Trans. By S. H. Horn

When the construction of the temple wall took place, it was with such care as to assure that in no place is there more than an eight inch difference in the thickness of the wall.

To the left is an artist's representation of the original Temple-Fortress. Although this is not what the actual structure looked like, it is within the architecture of the time. There is significant evidence that the Temple was destroyed by the Egyptians and rebuilt no later than 1650-1550 B.C. This is evident due to pottery fragments that were found between floor levels that were consistent with pottery of that time.



Also, after digging below the walls there was significant evidence that the existing walls were built on top of walls that were by design, those of a later period. It was also evident that they were not built on the same angle, but shifted approximately 5 degrees, for which there is no explanation.

There was also much data concerning the court altars. One is identified as being constructed of hew stone which cannot date earlier than the Late Bronze Age. Another was found constructed of gray brick dated in the Middle Bronze Age and assigned to the Original Temple.

It is believed that at some point during the second half of the 15th century, there was a rebuild/refortification effort of the city as well as some new flooring and a new altar in about 1200 B.C. or earlier.

To investigate the final destruction of the Temple, we look to the Word of God where we read in Judges chapter 9, verses 46 through 49:

And when all the men of the tower of Shechem heard that, they entered into an hold of the house of the god Berith. And it was told Abimelech, that all the men of the tower of Shechem were gathered together. And Abimelech gat him up to mount Zalmon, he and all the people that were with him; and Abimelech took an axe in his hand, and cut down a bough from the trees, and took it, and laid it on his shoulder, and said unto the people that were with him, What ye have seen me do, make haste, and do as I have done. And all the people likewise cut down every man his bough, and followed Abimelech, and put them to the hold, and set the hold on fire upon them; so that all the men of the tower of Shechem died also, about a thousand men and women.

There has been an enormous amount of data gathered about Biblical Shechem. However, there have also been many roadblocks in the discovery of even more evidence. As reported by archaeologists abroad, there is much more that we have to learn about Shechem. We will wait and see how it too will prove the Biblical account one hundred percent accurate.



This is an arial photograph of ancient Shechem with the Temple in the Center.

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