

The Mosaic Olive Press at Moresheth-Gath

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ON our last trip to Palestine in 1907 we visited Beit Jibrin and the rock caverns of Tell Sandahannah and Khurbet Mer'ash nearby; and, almost by accident, came upon an ancient olive press, with vats and mosaic floor; by far the most elaborate one we ever saw. It happened thus: after having examined the ruins, wells and *mezbeles* of the modern village of Beit Jibrin, we walked one mile south to the ruined church of St. Anne, visiting the painted tombs of Marissa and studying the inscriptions; then crossing over the knoll to the north-west we came up to a lime-kiln situated about three fourths of a mile south-west of the village. According to Baedeker we were now in the vicinity of Khurbet Mer'ash which by some is identified with Moresheth-Gath—the birth place of the prophet Micah (Mic. 1 14). Recalling the last portion of the compound name, *gath* and its significance “wine press,” we enquired of our local guide if there were no wine presses in the vicinity, whereupon he replied, with more than ordinary willingness and self-confidence, “Yes, sir, right over that wall there.” We followed him a few paces, climbed over a low fence which enclosed a number of olive trees, and to our great surprise and delight, there before us was a large and well defined wine press, or more probably an olive press, a plan and photograph of which accompany this brief sketch.

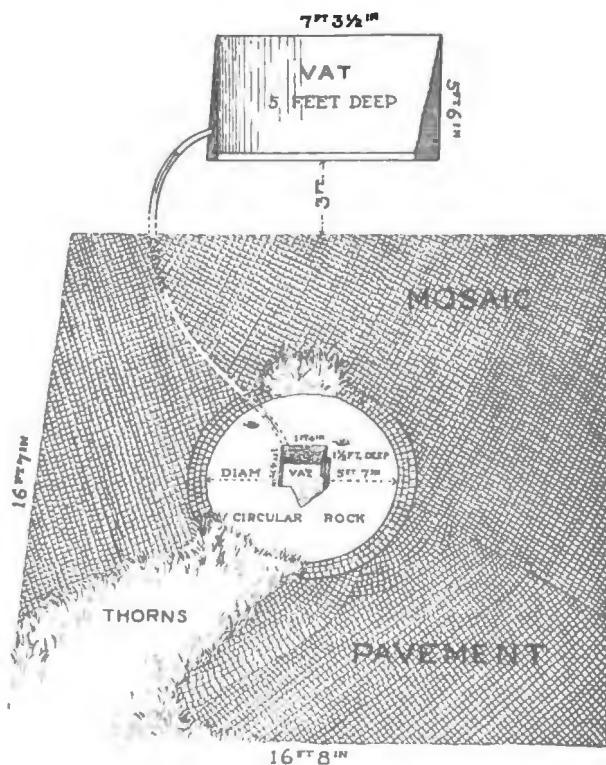
So far as we have been able to discover, no one of the many visitors to Beit Jibrin, or of the excavators of Marissa or Tell Sandahannah, has taken the pains to describe it; indeed, so far as the writer knows, it has never been observed. Neither Dr. F. J. Bliss nor Mr. R. A. Stewart Macalister in their monograph entitled “Excavations in Palestine,” 1902; nor Drs. Peters

and Thiersch in their "Painted Tombs in the Necropolis of Marissa," 1905, take any notice of it. We can hardly assume that any of these gentlemen ever had their attention called to it or they would certainly have made some allusion to it; for it bears the evident marks of antiquity, and among all the olive or wine presses discovered it certainly ranks as one of the most elaborate.

Briefly described it consists of two main parts: (1) *A Receiving Vat*, 7 ft. 3 1—2 in. long by 5 ft. 6 in. broad, and 5 ft. deep,



cut in the rock and bearing marks of having been in use for generations. (2) *A Mosaic Platform*, 16 ft. 8 in. long by 16 ft. 7 in. broad, the floor being paved with smooth white tesserae, and for the most part still in a fair state of preservation. In the center of this extensive mosaic pavement there is a large circular rock, 5 ft. 7 in. in diameter, in which there is a rectangular cutting 1 ft. 4 1—2 in. long by 1 ft. 4 in. broad, and 1 ft. 6 in. deep, the wall of one end having fallen away in part. This cavity was doubtless used as a Press Vat. For,



from it the juice expressed was evidently conducted by means of a small channel cut through the rock to the Receiving Vat which is on a slightly lower level. The distance from the one vat to the other was approximately 12 feet; that between the mosaic platform and the Receiving Vat being exactly 3.

At first sight I supposed we were looking upon an ancient wine press, but, on maturer reflection because of the olive groves which surround Beit Jibrin and which still grow closely contiguous to the press itself, I have concluded that its primary use was more probably for expressing olive oil.