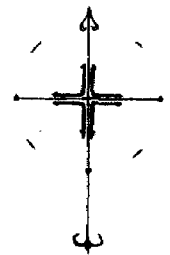
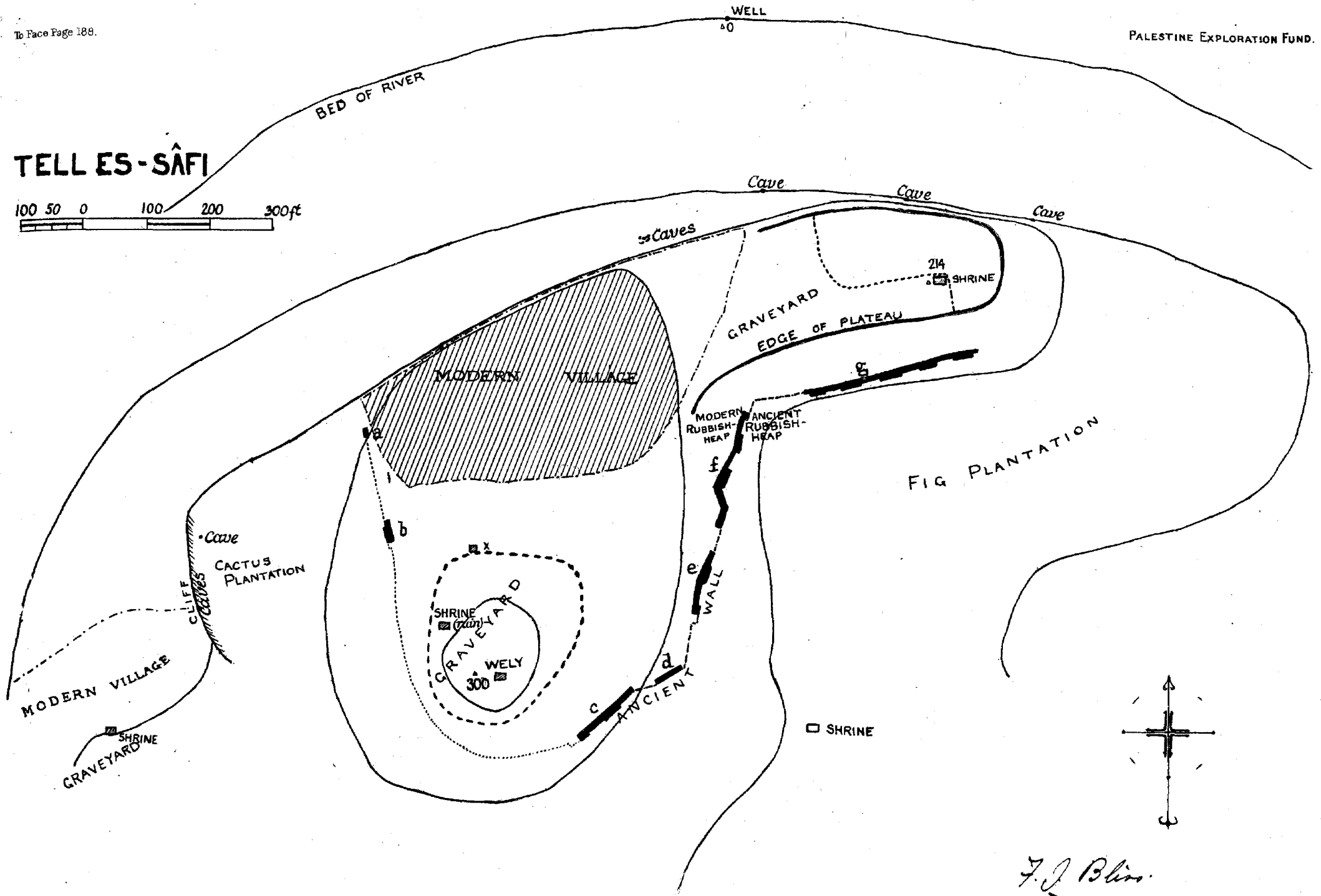
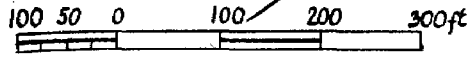


## FIRST REPORT ON THE EXCAVATIONS AT TELL-ES-SÂFI.

By F. J. BLISS, PH.D.

THOUGH the present permit, dating from October 1st, 1898, was obtained chiefly with the intention of excavating at Tell-es-Sâfi, work was not begun there till about five weeks ago. For various reasons it was thought wiser to start operations at Tell Zakariya, which is also within our area. That site proved to be so promising that, after the winter's break, we returned to continue the examination of the fortress crowning its summit. By April 22nd we had reached a convenient halting point, and closed the work, though it is possible that we may return to examine the lower plateau, where we have reason to suppose that the *débris* is not so disturbed as it is within the fortress. On Monday, April 24th, we moved to Tell-es-Sâfi, hoping to begin digging at once; but delay was occasioned by the indisposition of three of the party, by the occurrence of the Neby Mûsa Feast, as well as through a slight difficulty in making the people understand the reasons for our descent upon their Tell. However, all obstacles being overcome, we began our shafts on May 4th, and have continued without a day's interruption till the present day. The weather has been extraordinarily cool, north and west winds prevailing. The harvest used to interrupt our work at Tell-el-Hesy in May, so here before the barley was ready to be reaped we employed over 100 people a day, in order to have as large a remnant as possible after the harvest set in. At first the workmen were from both Zakariya and from Tell-es-Sâfi, but after the harvest was in full swing the local people all left, while we have retained about 50 of our trained labourers. Many of these sleep in a large tent on the edge of the camp, and thus furnish protection by night as well as labour by day. They bake their bread upon coals and ashes on the ground, making picturesque groups around their camp-fire. One night they got up a *Fantasiya*, with dancing and singing and firing of guns. For

# TELL ES-SÂFI



F. J. Bliss  
*R. A. ...*

our own comfort in the heat of the day we have erected a booth of poles and branches of the *Kharrûb*—a great improvement in summer upon canvas. We are most fortunate in striking a season when the stream-bed is dry, for it usually is full of stagnant water, producing malaria, which has given Tell-es-Sâfi an evil reputation in the whole district. Signs of the disease are visible in the inhabitants, whose listless appearance is in striking contrast to their more vigorous neighbours of Zakariya. Even in this off season we are constantly asked for quinine. Our camp, pitched on the col to the south of the tell, is open to all the breezes, and since work was started the health of the party has been excellent. The undeveloped state of the operations begun here, and the necessity of bringing the Tell Zakariya work up to date, while at the same time we have been pushing the excavations at full speed, have combined to prevent our preparing a full account of all that has been accomplished; hence the present report is merely a general summary.

The importance of the site of Tell-es-Sâfi has always been recognised by archaeologists. It is a striking point in the landscape from whatever direction it may be approached. The Vale of Elah, coming westwards through the low hills of the Shephelah, sweeps around its north side and at once enters the Philistine plain. Tell-es-Sâfi thus stands as a natural fortress between this plain and the rolling country. The view is magnificent. To the north appears the town of Ramleh, with its tower; to the east is the olive-dotted Shephelah, bounded by the Judean Mountains, and crossed by the lower ridge running from Tell-*ej*-Judeideh to Tell Zakariya; to the west lies the broad expanse of the maritime plain, with the sites of Ashdod and Ascalon quite distinct. The Wely—dedicated to the Khûdr—stands in the highest part of the Tell, *i.e.*, the south end, 300 feet above the well in the river bed. From the river bed the ground slopes up gradually to the base of cliffs of white limestone—in places bare, in others covered with weeds—which rise sometimes almost sheer to a height ranging from 100 to 150 feet. From the top of the cliffs the ground rises rapidly to the Wely. The summit of the Tell does not show the flat surface of Tell Zakariya. The ground near the grave-

yard surrounding the Wely is irregular and broken up by rubbish heaps. Beyond this it slopes down gradually north and north-east to the narrow plateau whose top is fairly level. The fall from the summit on the east side is at first rapid, and then more gradual; on the south the tell is joined to a ridge by a saddle some 100 feet below the summit.

The lofty south end must always have been the Acropolis. The mounds of rubbish represent the ruins of the Crusading fortress of Blanche-Garde, built in 1144 as an outpost of defence, during the war with the people of Ascalon. It fell into the hands of Saladin in 1187. In his book, published in 1872,<sup>1</sup> G. Key gives a sketch plan of the remains of this fortress. The Wely had apparently not been built at the time of his visit. According to him the building was about 60 metres square. At two angles he recognised the remains of towers, one of which appears to be on the site now occupied by the Wely. In 1875 Conder found the Wely, but says<sup>2</sup>:—"Of this fortress nothing remains but the rock-scarps, which are dimly traceable." We have observed the ruined top of a wall of well-squared masonry about 8 feet thick, extending north from under the east wall of the Wely. This is probably a portion of one of Key's towers. The other tower, with the rest of the building, may have been pulled down to form the Wely, the interior of which is lined with drafted stones. These do not show the diagonal chiselling characteristic of the Crusaders, but they may have been taken by them from older buildings. According to the people, the Wely was built some 30 years ago. Burials are constantly occurring on this site and the surface constantly changing. Hence the wall observed by us may have been underground at the time of Conder's visit. Key also observed traces of an outer enclosure. The portion seen by him appears to have disappeared, but the piece of walling now uncovered at X seems to be in line with the former, and may form a part of the same enclosure. To follow

<sup>1</sup> "Études sur les Monuments de l'Architecture Militaire des Croisés en Syrie et dans l'île de Chypre." Par G. Key. Paris, Imprimerie Nationale. Pp. 123-5.

<sup>2</sup> "Tent Work in Palestine," p. 76. One-volume edition.

up this clue would be almost impossible as the wall X is on the borders of the graveyard.

At several points along the slope of the tell there appear above the surface portions of a massive wall. Following these clues we have traced a large part of the rampart. We thus have, in all probability, the limits of the ancient city, as the rude construction of this rampart and the entire absence of mortar rule out the Crusaders as its builders. This wall follows the natural contours of this hill (whose shape is more or less like the moon in its first quarter) around its east, south, and west sides. On the precipitous north side a wall would appear to have been superfluous. Thus limited by the rampart and by the cliffs, the ancient city crowned the summit of the hill and extended part way down its slopes, having an extreme length of about 400 yards and an extreme breadth of about 200 yards. How little of this space is available for excavation will be seen by a glance at the plan. The south end is largely occupied by the modern graveyard, the modern village rules out the north portion, while another graveyard extends over a great part of the narrow plateau extending to the north-east. We are thus confined to the steep slopes above the wall, to a portion of the north-east plateau, and to a narrow section across the summit, east and west, between the southern graveyard and the modern town. The last portion does not give us a free hand as it is divided into three fields by lofty and dense hedges of cactus, the central field being planted with vegetables. The graveyard at the important south end will, of course, prevent our searching for the ancient Acropolis; but even if the tombs did not exist, the earliest remains could not have been examined here without digging through the foundations of Blanche-Garde.

Our first task was to make trial pits to determine the nature and depth of the accumulation. Three were sunk in a line east and west along the eastern half of the space available on the summit south of the village. In the shaft nearest the eastern slope rock was found at a depth of 41 feet, in the others at 30 feet and 24 feet 6 inches respectively. For the first 5 feet Arab pottery occurred. Below this for 5 feet or

more the ware was of Jewish types. Thence to the rock the fragments were pre-Israelite in character, growing more ancient as we descended. In the shaft nearest the slopes the styles were naturally somewhat mixed in the upper levels, but the lowest 20 feet showed an undisturbed stratum of pre-Israelite ware. In the three shafts sunk on the north-east plateau, rock was found at a depth ranging from 20 feet to 28 feet. The pottery results were practically the same as those from the other trial pits. This plateau accordingly seemed to have been inhabited in the earliest periods and hence called for investigation. Although I was aware that its position did not indicate the most important part of the city, certain practical considerations led me to make the first great clearance here rather than in the centre of the Tell. An area was accordingly marked out, measuring 80 feet north and south, and 90 feet east and west, bounded on the north by the steep slope and having the graveyard to the west and south. The intention was to work this in three sections, each 80 feet by 30 feet, in the manner described in the Tell Zakariya reports. We have now completed the first section and have deepened the second about halfway to the rock. In the first section rock was found at a depth ranging from 21 feet to 30 feet, the average depth being 26 feet. After a depth of 15 feet the problem of bringing the earth to the surface becomes difficult, and notwithstanding that we left two earth stairways in excavating the western line of the pit and dug two slanting trenches as a means of egress to north and south, the work went very slowly. Moreover, the limitations of space required that most of the earth and stones should be piled in a heap to the west. Hence the boy removing earth from the centre of the pit near the rock had to carry his basket 20 feet to the corner of the pit, then to mount a gangway to the bottom of the earth stairway, then to ascend the stairway to the surface, and finally to climb a huge pile of *débris* before he could empty the basket. Fortunately rock was reached first in the northern half of the pit, hence several feet of *débris* on the rock in the southern half had merely to be shifted to the excavated portion.

The thousands of potsherds exhumed daily were studied

piece by piece, analysed, and a summary of the results noted down. These results justified the conclusions drawn from the trial pits. I recognise four strata of pottery. From the surface to a depth of 7 feet we find a good proportion of Arab glazed ware, sometimes rudely marked with patterns. The other types include the Jewish forms found at Tell Zakariya (with the exception of the lamps with thick bases), a good deal of early Greek ware (B.C. 700-550), some specimens of Greek black and red ware (550-350), and a few pre-Israelite types. In this stratum were found the foundations of a series of rudely constructed chambers, built in mortar, as well as several fallen voussoirs. The dressed stones all showed signs of the fine diagonal Crusading chiselling. The ruined tops of most of these walls are immediately under the surface. These buildings may have been erected at the time of Blanche-Garde, their foundations being sunk in ancient *débris*. This fact accounts for the mixture of styles in pottery. The ware used by the Crusaders was doubtless the local Arab. From 8 to 10 feet we have the same ware as found in the upper stratum, minus the Arab stuff and with less late Greek. In this stratum two jar-handles with royal stamps occurred—one illegible, the other inscribed: "Belonging to the King of Shocoh." From 9 to 20 feet occur the pre-Israelite types found at Tell Zakariya, including Phœnician forms. At Tell-es-Sâfi the local painted ware shows a greater variety in patterns and colouring. A sprinkling of Ægean fragments occurs. From 21 feet to the rock the pre-Israelite ware continues, but shows a much greater proportion of the ledge-handles and other types found in the first city at Tell-el-Hesy (dating about 1600-1700 B.C.), but rare at Tell Zakariya. The paucity of the comb-faced ware, commonly associated with the ledge-handles at Tell-el-Hesy, is noticeable. In this lowest stratum Phœnician ware and the local painted types are absent. We thus have four strata: a pre-Israelite stratum on the rock, older than the lowest stratum at Tell Zakariya; a later pre-Israelite stratum; a stratum contemporaneous with the Jewish period, and extending into Greek times; and a Crusading stratum. The appearance of archaic ware in the higher levels is explained by a

series of walls found in the Jewish stratum, with foundations extending into the stratum below, whose *débris* was thus disturbed in places brought to the then existing surface. The city walls at the points tested were not found to rest directly on the rock but on the lowest stratum of *débris*. As their massive foundations must have been sunk in a considerable depth of *débris*, it would appear that they were not built much earlier than the Jewish period. Thus, according to the testimony of the pottery, the place appears to have had a continuous history from the eighteenth to the fourth centuries B.C., when it appears to have been abandoned till the period of the Crusaders, whose occupation was brief.

The objects found in this great clearance were of stone, bronze, iron, and paste. The most important of these will be drawn later, and I confine myself now to a general catalogue. In stone: uninscribed weights, catapult balls, a lamp-stand, slate spindle-whorls, beads, a small, rudely-incised cylinder, corn rubbers, &c. In bronze: three coins, spatulas, pins, arrow heads, fragments of vessels, &c. In iron: bolts, pins, arrow heads, spear heads, fragments of knives, a sickle, &c. Hardly any iron was found more than 14 feet below the surface. In paste: many beads, two scarabs, one scaraboid (Babylonian?) representing a man on horseback attacking a lion, three Egyptian amulets—one in the form of an ape, the second a lion-headed figure, the third perhaps a Bes. One Crusading coin of silver was found near the surface.

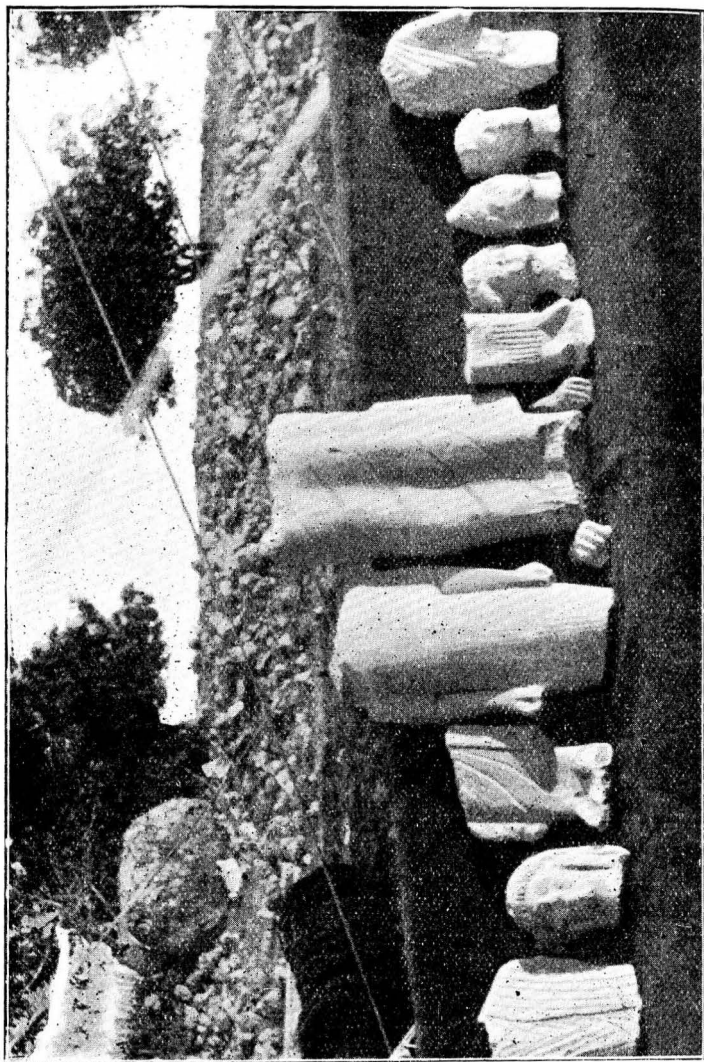
We may now describe the city wall, small portions of which we found exposed on our arrival at *a*, *b*, *c*, *e*, and *f*. Long sections were laid bare by excavation. At the points tested it was found to rest on from 6 to 11 feet of *débris*. It was seen at two points to be 12 feet thick, and consists of external and internal facings of rubble, with a filling of earth and field stones. The face stones are laid in mud mixed with straw. Projecting from the wall, at intervals ranging from 28 feet to 35 feet 9 inches, are buttresses, ranging in length of face from 30 to 34 feet. The maximum projection is only 2 feet: this is necessarily exaggerated on the small scale plan. The masonry consists of rudely-spaced rubble set in courses ranging in



height from 1 foot 3 inches to 2 feet. The stones are roughly squared, except at the coigns of the buttresses, where the work is much better. The interstices are filled in with mud and small field stones. The masonry is mainly plain-faced, though two or three drafted stones occur. Signs of dressing are very faint, and I prefer to postpone my description till I have had time to examine carefully each stone in the deep shafts. In places the wall has been plastered with dark mud and straw, over which is a layer of white mud mixed with straw made by mixing a powder of unburned limestone with water. This kind of plaster is used in the Lebanon to-day. At *b* five courses crop out above the surface, and this is probably the part seen by Dr. Petrie, and rightly taken by him to be a portion of the ancient rampart.

Immediately to the south of the Wely there are traces of mud-brick, reduced by conflagration to burned brick, cropping out from the surface. This occurs in the line of the city wall, and we have begun operations in order to see whether the wall at this point is entirely mud-brick or whether it has stone foundations. We have proved the existence of a thick brick wall, but neither its thickness nor the character of its foundations have been yet determined. At the south end of the projection at *c* we sank a shaft to the rock, finding 33 feet of the wall standing on 7 or 8 feet of *débris*. At 19 feet occur the flooring and walls of a room which appears to have been built in late times against the outer face of the rampart. The absence of a buttress along the 60 feet traced at *d* is curious. Here at the base of the wall is a one-course footing with an offset of 1 foot 9 inches. At *e* a short flight of steps descends along the face of the buttress. Part of the wall at *f* has a marked batter, 2 feet 6 inches in 15 feet. It stands to a height of 21 feet on 11 feet of *débris*: the upper courses were exposed on our arrival. The regularity of the buttress system at *g* is noticeable, the paces measuring 34 feet, 33 feet 8 inches, 34 feet, 33 feet 8 inches, and 33 feet 10 inches, and the inter-buttress spaces 33 feet 7 inches, 32 feet, 31 feet 6 inches, and 33 feet. To attempt to trace the wall eastwards from *g* and around the slope would be unedifying, as its course is clear. Were there

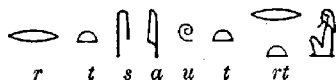
ever any wall along the north cliff, which is improbable, its course is equally plain. However, we hope to trace the wall



FRAGMENTS OF STATUETTES FROM ANCIENT RUBBISH HEAP AT TELL-ES-SÂFI.

westwards from *c*, in order to find its connection with the mud-brick wall, and in the hopes of finding a gate which was probably on the south side.

To the tracing of this wall at *f* we are indebted for the most interesting objects discovered at Tell-es-Sâfi. Part of this section is under the modern rubbish heap which was proved to have been superposed in part over an ancient rubbish heap. In front of the wall and along its ruined top was found a strange mixture of objects of which I can give now only a general summary: pottery ranging from early pre-Israelite to late Greek, including a stamped jar-handle with two lines of Hebrew writing; busts and other fragments of statuettes in limestone; fragments of face-masks in pottery; figurines in pottery in great variety, including one which appears to be Pan; Egyptian amulets; beads in great quantities; a Babylonian scaraboid; fragment of a Ushabti figure, with hieroglyph inscription, &c., &c. A mine suggesting such possibilities of discovery deserved working, and two gangs of competent men have been tracing its limits, passing every basketful of earth through sieves. We appear now to have reached the limits of this precious stratum. North and south it extends over a length of about 35 feet only; at the east it comes to an end at a rude wall several feet out from the rampart; on the west side it does not seem to extend beyond the inner face of the rampart, though we have not given up all hope in that direction. These objects were plainly cast down at one time, at a period when the rampart was in ruins. The statuettes are certainly not classic Greek. They suggest the late Palmyrene statues, as well as the archaic Greek figures found in the making up below the Acropolis at Athens. The excessive ornamentation of robes and head-dresses is common to both. A general photograph is now submitted, but photographs of each fragment will be taken later. From the slight study I have been able thus far to give to the objects from this rubbish heap, I am inclined to think that the interruption in the history of the tell occurred at a period later than that suggested by the pottery exhumed in the clearance pit. In tracing the wall at *g* a very small fragment of an Egyptian stele was found, reading as follows:—



The stamp on the jar-handle just referred to is in the form of a rude circle, 1.25 centimetres in diameter, with two lines of Hebrew writing, separated, as in the case of well-known Hebrew seals, by two parallel bars. In stamping an unequal pressure was used, hence the right upper corner is not plain. Four letters appear clearly in the upper line with traces of another, probably a *lamed*, at the right. The top of the next letter is incomplete, but it is probably a *resh*. The only possible alternatives would be a late form of *tsade*, as found in examples of Maccabean times, and a form of *samech* found in the Siloam inscription. The last three letters are unmistakably פתי. Taking the letter immediately before as a *resh*, we have the word רפתוי, the construct form of the plural רפתים, found only once in the Old Testament (Hab. iii, 17), where it



1 CM

STAMP ON JAR-HANDLE FROM TELL-ES-SÂFI.

is translated as *stalls* (for cattle). The singular does not occur anywhere. Five letters appear in the second line, which reads יהואל, the only doubtful letter being the third, which is not precisely like any example of *vau* known to us, but which resembles a *vau* more than it does any other letter. By analogy with other stamps this word must be a proper name, and the combination of יהו (Jahveh) with other words in a proper name is common. The meaning of the name is thus: "Jehovah is God." As an example of a proper name of similar composition we may cite Jehiel—"Jehovah liveth." It is interesting to have found evidence of Jahveh worship at this site. Taking the first letter of the upper line as a *lamed*, by analogy with other stamps, the whole inscription reads:

“Belonging to the stalls or stables of Jahuel.” On the discovery of this jar-handle I wrote the Committee that the upper line probably read לרפאי, to be translated “To the shades of—.” Unfortunately for the eschatological possibilities involved in this reading it cannot be maintained, as a more careful cleaning (by placing the jar-handle overnight in vinegar, and then using a brush) has shown that the fourth letter cannot be an *aleph*, but has the single crossbar characteristic of a *tau*.

The question may now be asked: what light have our investigations thrown on the identification of Tell-es-Sâfi with Gath? This identification was originally advanced purely on the grounds of the importance and position of the site, no determination having been made of its antiquity. However, in 1890, Dr. Petrie made a brief examination of the surface pottery, and found pre-Israelite types. Our work has amply confirmed his observations. We have proved the existence of a city, built in pre-Israelite times, and probably fortified during the Jewish period. Gath was in existence at the time of Joshua's conquest (Joshua xi, 22), and was fortified by Rehoboam (2 Chron. xi, 8). Our proof thus is negative: nothing has been found to show that Tell-es-Sâfi cannot be Gath. Positive proof cannot be expected short of the discovery of inscriptions. That the tell contains such records is quite within the range of possibilities. That these may be found by us is a desire felt, I am sure, by all the readers of these lines.

TELL-ES-SÂFI, *June 12th, 1899.*