

## THE FUND'S EXCAVATION OF ASKALON.

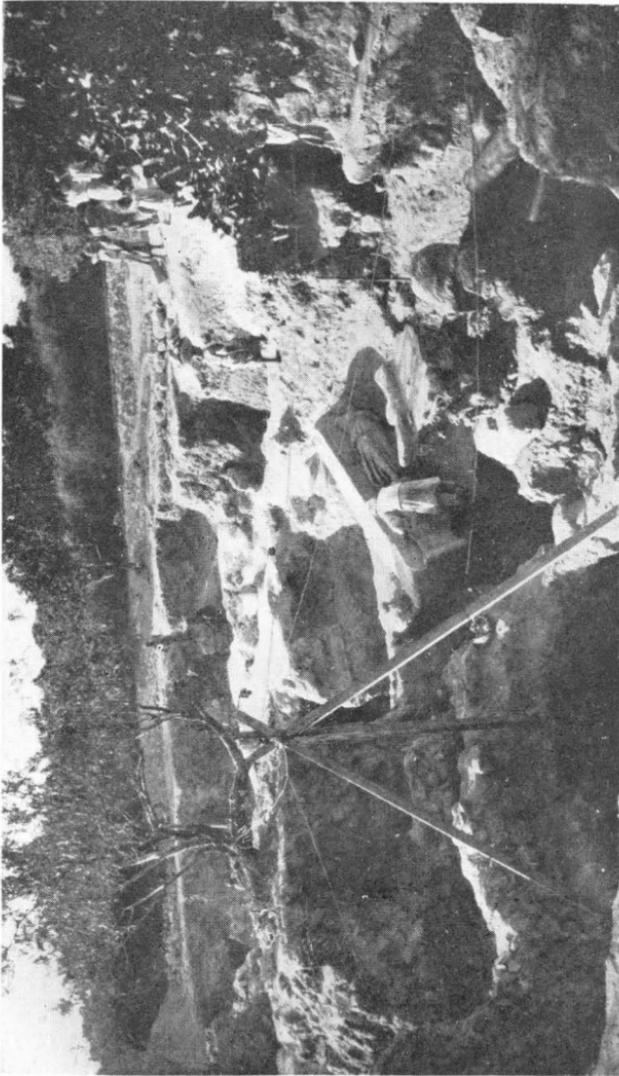
DR. GARSTANG reports that preliminary arrangements were begun in the latter part of August for the P.E.F. Excavation of Askalon. The camp was pitched in the field containing the "Roman Foundations," and the workmen were employed in cleaning the paths and in collecting the scattered capitals or pieces of sculpture scattered about on the surface. Work was commenced at a statue of Fortune (Tyché), at or near which another statue was known to be buried, and arrangements were made for unearthing it. It proved to be a fine architectural statue of a Victory (Niké), poised on a globe which is upheld by Atlas.

An account of Askalon, with a number of illustrations, appeared in the *Illustrated London News*, October 9.

On September 9th, His Excellency, the High Commissioner, arrived at the camp, and on the 10th, after inspecting the ruins, he performed the opening ceremony of excavation by cutting the first sod.

In a later report (October 23rd) Dr. Garstang states that the work is being supervised by Mr. Quibell, Mr. Pythian-Adams, the Director's Assistant, and Dr. Garstang himself; a student of the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem is also present. An investigation was made of a Byzantine church, presumably of the eighth century, with fragments of Greek and Cufic inscriptions. To the south-east are remains of a Crusaders' church, and on the sea-shore to the west, methodical cuttings have been made in order to ascertain the possibilities and to establish the sequence of the local pottery: He says—

"Our investigation around the Byzantine church has disengaged that building from the higher ground to the N.W., but, except in disclosing the church walls, they have not yielded up anything other than late Byzantine and mediaeval remains, as was indeed to be anticipated. The church is, I suppose, of the seventh century. There is a single apse on the east face, the three enclosing walls of which are straight; the entrance appears to be opposite the apse in the western wall. The inside is pilastered and the roof was



THE EXCAVATION OF ASKALON. THE PEACE POOL.

clearly domed; columns, corresponding to the pilasters, supporting the roof in the interior. We have not proceeded far inside: it is full of debris, and though the walls stand high the roof has fallen. The further excavation of this church requires special consideration. A few small fragments of inscriptions, Greek and Cufic, and numerous sherds of Byzantine and mediaeval period, have been dug up. Conspicuous among these fragments are specimens of early faience.

A trench, parallel with the church, a short way to the north, has disclosed some stout foundations, which may prove to be of Hellenistic times. Preliminary trenching in field No. 5,<sup>1</sup> where some of the debris has been piled, has already yielded numerous fragments of Greek and local pottery of this period. A further exploration in field No. 24,<sup>1</sup> showed deep layers above and including the Roman levels; this terrace could only be properly explored by driving in from the southern scarp, a piece of work which can be undertaken only after the church is finished.

In the field, south-east of the Byzantine church, are remains of a Crusaders' church. Beyond this, again, we have located the Bir Ibrahim, and have recovered from its neighbourhood pieces of sculpture, which, coupled with local tradition, invite a thorough examination of this spot.

On the seashore, west of the Byzantine church, we have made two methodical cuttings with a view to ascertaining the possibilities of attack from that side, and also to establishing a sequence of the local pottery. The results are being studied in the light of the more complete and more fruitful sections in the northern scarp.

In the northern scarp of the central mound we have completed a first section of the face, done methodically in forty-five "steps," descending 7 metres below the Roman level; 9·30 metres below the upper surface of the scarp and 2·20 metres below the lower surface.

The results have been of the highest interest and importance. We have secured specimens of the local ceramics of every period from post-Neolithic up to Roman, determined their relative positions; and, thanks to clear traces of Greek and Hellenistic levels, have been able to assign approximately certain painted wares (including one vase fairly complete) to pre-Hellenistic and Philistine periods;

<sup>1</sup> The numbers refer to the plan sent by Dr. Garstang, which, together with other photographs not reproduced in this issue, can be seen at the Office of the Fund. A plan of the excavations will be given at a later stage.

while other lower levels, also fertile in painted fabrics, seem to indicate the Canaanitish civilisation corresponding to the XVIIIth dynasty and earlier. The fragments selected from these stratifications have been brought to Jerusalem and arranged in the school for mature study; we are assured already of valuable criteria for controlling the results of all further deep excavations, and have, as is clearly located, strata of first historical importance. A brick house on stone foundations in this cutting may well be of Philistine date and origin.

No trace has been found of "Neolithic" remains, though our sections both here and on the shore have penetrated into the sea sand and to the level of the shore.

The ramparts have been examined here and there for completeness of the fresh survey which I have made. The construction and other indications suggest to me a late Roman foundation for the existing stone ramparts. But this work overlies hard earth of made character, which suggests another and earlier origin, though much outside the confines of the two mounds which the walls enclose.

The most active centre of work, while pursuing these necessary investigations, has been the field (No. 61), in which the "Tyché" statue was lying uncovered, and the "Victory" was unearthed. Here, little by little, and with as much precaution as possible, we have been able to lay bare, at considerable depth, the traces of a temple or other public building in the best Roman style, constructed entirely (columns, entablature, floors, walls and all) in Greek and Italian marble; vast in its conception and characteristic in its execution. The order is Corinthian, the capitals and proportions are after the models of the Pantheon, with some details in the tracing of the acanthus and the position of the volutes which betray Greek influences. The diameter of the column-drums, which are of Greek marble, is about 75 cms. at their lower ends, or 85 with the bottom moulding. The top of the base proper measures 90 cms. Inter-columniation presumed at present to be 4 diameters. The mouldings of the base are the characteristic torus-scutia-torus with fillets between. The pedestals introduce other motives. The height of the capitals is about 95 cms. The building is connected structurally with a round tank, which appears outside the middle of its southern façade. On one side of the tank the Victory lies prone upon its side, having fallen towards the main building; on the other side a



THE EXCAVATION OF ASKALON. THE STATUE OF PEACE.



THE EXCAVATION OF ASKALON. THE PEACE POOL STATUE.

newly-found statue lies upon its back, having fallen in the other direction. Both statues are of Caryatid architectural character, and have been partly bedded into a wall or antae. The wall upon which these statues stood encloses an ambulatory around the southern end of the main structure. The newly-found statue holds a palm branch, and in the left hand held possibly a wreath. It seems unlikely that there would be two statues of Victory differing in emblem, and the latter may be taken to represent Peace. The base and plinth have in this case been sawn off and are defaced.

The tank is surrounded by three circular concentric walls, all centred upon it, and forming generally half circles abutting on the southern end of the columned building. The outer wall is well preserved, and is traced into and through the adjoining field (No. 67) under the modern road, following always the same curve, and in this part exedrae and other features, including the marble floor of an upper terrace, are well indicated. The whole was lined with Carrara marble. These curving walls separated in fact two ambulatories, the outer one higher than the inner, while in the middle at a lower level again was the tank, surrounded by small columns which carried a canopy above a well-laid floor of marble tiles in two colours. The description of the Peace-Pool of Antoninus Martyr (560-570 A.D.): "There is a well of peace (Puteus Pacis) made after the fashion of a theatre (or, as one reading runs, 'built on the site of a theatre'), in which one descends by steps into the water . . .," leaps to the mind. The Medeba Mosaic Map also gives a distinct suggestion of a rounded columnar structure abutting upon a large columned court. We cannot doubt that we are in the presence of a building which, in Byzantine times, was a striking feature of Askalon. It also seems to be an historical feature, for deep down, about twelve to sixteen feet below the surface, we are now finding the outline and retaining walls of the building that preceded it. The tank seems to have been much larger and the structure more solid, while tending to the same general outline and position. Fragments of votive statues in white marble and the torso of one such, have come to light, while a curious and perhaps significant discovery is that of a potsherd decorated in relief with the picture of a man fishing with a rod, with two fish caught upon the line. Remembering that the Peace-Pool is in the southern part of the site, connected with what seems to have been the chief public building, presumably the "Tycheion," possibly a great forum of the city, the question

spontaneously arises whether we are not really on the site of the far older fish pond and sanctuary of Derceto.

The work is proceeding, and at the time of writing the sandalled foot and an arm of a giant statue in marble have just come to light amid the debris of a marble shrine, quite near the statue of "Tyché," of Isis type, that first attracted us to this field. The foot of this statue measures 98 cms., or almost a metre from heel to toe, and the workmanship is of high standard.

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### NEO-BABYLONIAN SIGNET WITH PHENICIAN INSCRIPTION.

By E. J. PILCHER.

MR. HERBERT CLARK, of Jerusalem, has recently acquired an interesting little relic, found in Philistia, which typifies in itself the curious welter of nationalities that made up the Achæmenian Empire. It is a cone-shaped seal of the class usually recognised as belonging to the *Persian* period. It has a legible inscription in *Phœnician* characters which, when deciphered, reveals a *Babylonian* name. It was discovered in the south of Palestine, and was probably the property of some official; for the early Persians were mere soldiers, and they were compelled to employ members of the subject populations for administrative work.

A fellah, working his field near the town of Gaza, turned up some pebbles, one of which he recognised as an engraved stone. He took



(Reversed.)

Neo-Babylonian Signet.

it with him to Jerusalem on the first opportunity, and sold it to Mr. Clark for forty piastres. It is a bluish-white chalcedony, shaped as a cone of a circular section, with rounded top and bottom. It is about an inch long and three-quarters of an inch in diameter. Near the top it is pierced with a hole for suspension. The base of the cone is convex, and is engraved with a scene of the ordinary devotional character. The accompanying illustration is taken from an impression.

On the left is a figure, apparently a lunar deity, in the guise of a bearded man rising out of a crescent moon. On