

## THE HARVARD EXCAVATIONS AT SAMARIA.

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THOSE who travel through Palestine, especially those who ride by the older route, carry away a vivid impression of the wonderful site of Samaria—the modern *Sebastiyeh*. It is a lofty hill marked out by nature for an ancient stronghold but of too wide an area for any but a capital city. Omri appropriately named it Shōmerōn, the watch tower (1 Kings xvi, 24). Shut in on three sides by ranges of hills, too distant to be perilous in the days of ancient warfare, it has an outlook westwards across a great broad vale to the sea, twenty miles away. Its strength of position is witnessed to by the length of the sieges it has endured. The beauty of the site appeals to all. Isaiah, in denouncing its moral delinquencies, describes it as the—“Faded flower of his glorious beauty which is on the head of the fat valley” (Isaiah xxviii, 4). To-day it is perhaps a “faded” flower but the destruction of her glorious palaces cannot obliterate the beauty of the fertile hill and vale.

The site has never been lost like that of many an ancient town. All through the Christian centuries wide scattered ruins have borne abundant evidence to the greatness of the city, renamed Sebaste, which Herod erected on the site.

But of the earlier city little has been known until recent years. The site is so vast that it may have deterred many a would-be explorer. All the more must we be grateful for the magnificent work of the Expedition which, under Dr. Reisner, excavated here some fourteen years ago on behalf of the University of Harvard. Those who knew the thoroughness of Dr. Reisner's work and were privileged to see the great scale in which it was done have impatiently awaited the publication of the results. These are now presented to us in two handsome volumes, copies of which have just been presented to our library. A brief account of the work will be of interest to many readers of the *Quarterly Statement*.

The story of the delays which attended the commencement of these excavations is a glaring example of the difficulties of all such archaeological work under the old Turkish regime. Dr. Reisner, supported by the influence of Theodore Roosevelt, then President of the United States, personally applied at Constantinople for a

permit to excavate this well-known site in November, 1905. Although this application had the warm support of Hamdy Bey, the Director of the Imperial Museum, the permit was not granted till 1907. The two years of delay had dislocated all the original plans and it was impossible for the explorers to make a start before the end of April, 1908. Dr. Reisner, assisted by Dr. Schumacher of Haifa, made a commencement at work, but after only five and a half days local difficulties compelled its suspension and Dr. Reisner had to withdraw with his staff of Egyptian workmen to Egypt. A second effort was made by Professor Lyon and Dr. Schumacher between May 22nd and June 3rd but interference by the local officials was soon renewed in an aggravated form. The position became so hopeless that these explorers had to undertake the long journey to Constantinople to have the affair settled. They had a most satisfactory interview with Hamdy Bey and his brother Khalil Bey, and, at last, in July, they were able to set up their tents and get to work. The coming into power of the "Young Turks" at this juncture helped matters and a short excavation of four weeks was carried out. This was, however, preliminary to the more systematic and fully-equipped exploration which occupied much of 1909-1910. The greater part of the report deals with this latter period of systematic and thorough work carried out by the fully-equipped staff—Professor Reisner, Mr. Clarence Fisher and Mr. Otto Bates.

Unlike many ancient sites in Palestine the history of Samaria is comparatively short—a mere millenium—and all we know from historic records is abundantly confirmed by the archaeological finds. The city had no prehistoric past. It is the only city site in Palestine which was founded *de novo* by the Israelites. The Israelite buildings—*e.g.*, the palace of the city's founder, Omri—were built upon the rocky hill summit, the bareness of which is witnessed to by the abundant "cup marks" and rock cut olive presses over which the foundations were laid. Of the palace enough was found to show its general plan and that of its extensions by Ahab and Jeroboam II. The Israelitish city walls were massive. They have been only partially excavated, but the famous western gate of the city—visited by countless tourists—owed its first foundations to the Kings of Israel, though rebuilt again and again through the following centuries. After its destruction by Sargon the city rose to comparative importance and flourished from the 5th to the 1st Centuries B.C.

The ground plans of many large houses have been excavated but no great public buildings were discovered belonging to these centuries. The abundant Seleucid coins witness to the continued occupation of the site. Its complete destruction (107 B.C.) by John Hyrcanus as recorded by history is confirmed by the excavations. In connection with this it is worth quoting the interpretation given here of the account given by Josephus. He states (*Ant.* xiii, x, 3) that "when Hyrcanus had taken the city, which was not done till after a year's siege, he was not contented with doing that only but he demolished it entirely and brought rivulets to it to drown it, for he dug such hollows as might let the waters run under it; nay, he took away the very marks that there had ever been such a city there." This, which could not possibly be taken literally by those who know the site, is here paraphrased: "Hyrcanus completely wiped out the city, exposing it to the washing of the winter torrents, for, breaching it so that it fell in confused ruins into the gullies, he destroyed all signs that a city had existed." The excavations show that whatever Josephus himself had in mind the latter is the true account. History states that the city was restored by Galbanus (57-55 B.C.), and this is confirmed by the coins found—but the period of Samaria's architectural magnificence is due to Herod the Great. To raise his great temple high upon the summit above the surrounding houses he made a platform by constructing a massive retaining wall around the highest point of the hill and filling the space within by using extensively the ruins of earlier periods—producing thereby a perplexing puzzle to the archaeologist. Upon the level platform so formed he raised his temple, the foundations of which were the most impressive of the architectural remains uncovered on the site. To Herod's ambition also belong the Basilica (columns of which were visible before the excavations), the well-known street of columns and the greatest development of the western gateway.

The temple of Herod was renovated in the days of Septimius Severus but after this the city seems to have fallen into gradual decay and "during the Byzantine and Arab times the summit appears to have been a mass of ruined walls and fallen stones."

Such in brief is the history of the site. The hill is by no means fully excavated but enough has been found to show this work in building or distinction of the great rulers whose names associated with the city's history.

The outstanding features of general interest are—(1) *The Palace of the Kings of Israel*, (2) *The Western Gateway*, (3) *The Herodian Buildings*, and (4) *The Ostraka*.

(1) *The Plan of the Palace of Omri* can be determined because the rock outside its area was quarried away along the exterior lines of the building, leaving a solid core of rock with a perpendicular scarp as a base for the structure. This scarping stands out for its thoroughness. The rock surface itself was channelled to secure the foundation stones. The masonry used was, however, a local yellow limestone of poor quality. The plan was the common oriental one of a series of open courts with groups of rooms around. The central court was  $55\frac{1}{2}$  feet by  $29\frac{1}{2}$  feet. In the time of Ahab (875–851 B.C.) the size of this royal residence was greatly increased; the original palace remained the nucleus but wings were carried out slightly towards the west. "It must have had very much the appearance of one of the great Assyrian palaces." Just within the northern wall of this palace was a pool—the "Pool of Samaria"—33 feet long and  $16\frac{1}{2}$  feet broad, the bottom and sides of which were lined by a hard grey cement nearly 4 inches thick. The bottom of the pool was 15 feet below the level of the palace floor.

The palace was further extended during the reign of Jeroboam II and a great defensive tower with walls  $7\frac{1}{2}$  feet thick was added at the south-west corner. The diameter of the tower was some 48 feet.

Some of the palace stones had mason's marks with Phoenician or Hebrew characters.

(2) *The Western Gate*.—At this site, which remained the chief entrance to the city through all its history, there was much reconstruction during successive ages, much of the earlier work was inevitably destroyed but enough remained of a great square bastion to show that in Israelitish times a city gateway stood here. Another bastion was built in the Greek period but the great rounded towers which survive to a considerable extent to-day belong to the massive fortifications of the enlarged city of the Roman period.

(3) *The Herodian Buildings*.—"During the Roman period the city attained its greatest extent and magnificence. Herod rebuilt the city on entirely new plans and with an enlarged area. The enclosing walls were re-erected considerably outside the old lines except at the western gate the site of which was still retained as

the main entrance to the city. Through the new area south of the summit a wide street with colonnades on either side was built from the gate eastward. This followed the contour of the hill along the foot of the cliff, which, until this period, had formed the limits of the city. On one of the eastern terraces of the hill was placed the Forum of the city (where the village threshing-floor now is) enclosed with a colonnade and with the Basilica at its western end. The highest point of the hill was reserved by Herod for a large temple in honour of his patron Augustus. This was erected on an artificial terrace the retaining walls of which, protected at the corners and at the sides with towers, were built largely on the old Greek Fort Wall. To the north-east of the Forum but considerably below it, a Hippodrome was laid out and farther along on the north side of the hill the conformation of the ground and protruding fragments of masonry indicate the site of a theatre."

#### *The Great Temple.*

The approach to the temple from the north was through a great forecourt some 70 yards long. The sides diverged so that while it was some 60 yards wide at its northern end it was 54 yards wide at the southern end where the great staircase commenced. At the foot of this staircase, a few feet inside the court, was an altar  $5\frac{1}{2}$  feet high.

In the debris east of the altar was found a mutilated marble statue of heroic size, which was probably that of Augustus.

The staircase was one of the most striking objects excavated. It extended the whole width of the building—some 70 feet—and consisted of two flights of twelve steps.

Of the temple and the adjoining buildings itself nothing remained but the foundations but these are sufficiently preserved to allow of a complete plan being made.

Both staircase and the temple and other buildings on the summit was considerably reconstructed by Severus and it is not always possible to disentangle with certainty which constructions belonged to the earlier building.

To the west of the Forum was the Basilica, consisting of a large central hall with open colonnades or aisles on three sides. Some of the columns are still standing *in situ* and two almost perfect Corinthian capitals were found in the debris. The central hall was

paved with stone, the side aisles with plain white mosaic with a narrow black border near the edges. At the northern end was a semi-circular tribunal with four concentric seats with moulded edges.

(4) *The Ostraka*.—In some of the chambers of Ahab's palace were found a number of inscribed potsherd bearing Hebrew inscriptions written with carbon ink. On epigraphical grounds the writing would be ascribed to the 8th or 9th century B.C. but the position in which they were found, in the lowest part of the debris of occupation, and the fact that in close association with them was found a dated Egyptian jar of the reign of Osorkon II, a contemporary of Ahab, makes it almost certain that they belong to the reign of this monarch. As the first objects of this kind found in Palestine these writings must always be of value and interest, and the finding of a similar fragment by the Rev. Garrow Duncan at Jerusalem raises hopes that with careful search and infinite caution in handling potsherds other inscriptions may yet be found.

These ostraka are from various types of jars and they are all dated in the year of some unnamed king's reign—probably Ahab's. They are notes of commercial transactions in oil or wine. There are 63 belonging to this group. In some cases where the fragments were found to fit together independent inscriptions had been written on each fragment suggesting that they were broken before use. The greatest interest in these inscriptions lies in the great number of personal and place names which occur. For a full discussion as well as a reproduction of the whole of the inscriptions with some obvious or probable restorations the reader is referred to the original work.

It only remains to add that the whole of these monographs has been magnificently produced. The first volume, though profusely illustrated, deals primarily with the report itself. There are scholarly sections on methods of work and detailed descriptions of the masonry, invaluable to other explorers. The second volume contains plans in colours showing the various archaeological strata and photographs of the excavations in every stage. A more thoroughly scientific and instructive report cannot be conceived.