

ASKALON REPORTS.

The Philistine Problem.

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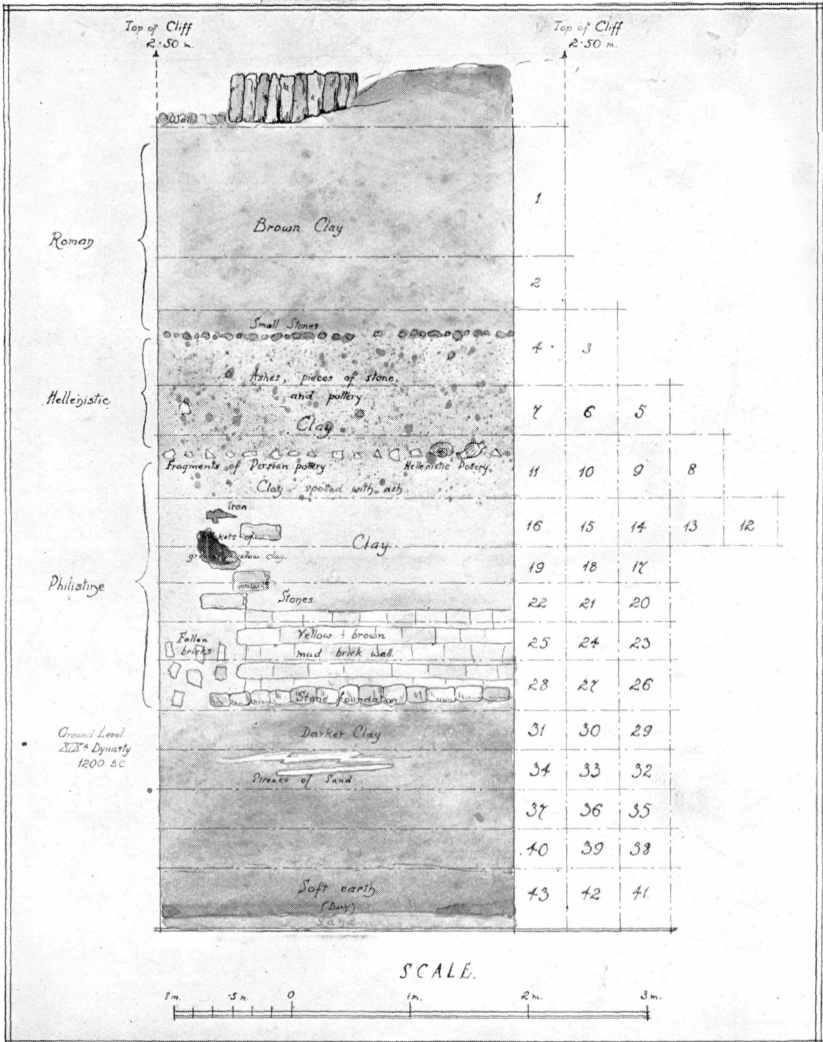
THE prospect of recovering some direct evidence bearing upon the question of the identity of the Philistines is one of our chief expectations in undertaking the important excavations now proceeding at Askalon. Such evidence as came to light during the preliminary months of work in 1920 is described scientifically, in the second portion of this note, by Mr. Phythian-Adams, and will be appreciated by all as an example of careful work and studious method. It would have been appropriate to preface these preliminary accounts of the results obtained by a brief examination of the nature of the problem and the character of the evidence which has hitherto held the field; the daily occupation of the field-work, however, makes this impossible for the present, but I feel that these notes should no longer be delayed. Later on I shall hope to compare and co-ordinate the results of my consultations in England, during this Spring, with Members of the Committee—Dr. Hogarth, Dr. Macalister, Dr. Mackenzie, Prof. J. L. Myres, and others.

Our knowledge of the Philistines is derived in part from the Egyptian accounts of conflict with them in the time of Rameses III, shortly after 1200 B.C. This is the only contemporary source of evidence, and is especially important as referring apparently to the coming of the Philistines, and their settlement on the Plain. The next and most familiar source is the Old Testament, wherein the references to the Philistines, though not contemporary in the texts as we know them, were probably derived directly from contemporary archives. Further, the allusions are homogeneous and disclose a coherent account of the distribution and organization of the Philistine cities, with occasional glimpses of their social life, their household objects as well as their methods in war.

There is a third source of information—the traditional history which is embedded in the pages of ancient authors. Such history is often naive and legendary, but though it cannot be treated as on the same footing as contemporary evidence, it is based on sources worthy of scientific consideration—tenacious folklore and the immemorial epics of court minstrelsy.

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Finally, a fourth source is that to which we now appeal, namely, direct archaeological evidence. In the account which Mr. Phythian-Adams gives of sections cut through the town site of Askalon we shall realize the process and the method involved in this aspect of enquiry.

It only remains to add by way of preliminary explanation, that we have been able to determine the layer just preceding the Philistine occupation, about 1250 B.C., and to recognize the more apparent traces of the Hellenistic period that followed. The former is at a depth of 7.50 metres and the latter at 5.50 metres below the modern surface of the soil (see diagram). The two metres depth of earth lying between these two levels therefore represent the accumulation of the Philistine occupation of the site (steps 28 to 16 inclusive). This section is not altogether homogeneous; there are traces of a house built of mud bricks upon foundations of stone, there is a considerable accumulation of debris composed of decaying and fallen bricks and other deposits, but the whole belongs to the Philistine period. The method of utilizing this evidence then is to compare what was found in the excavation of this stratum, notably the broken potsherds, with what is found in the earlier and later stratifications below and above, to see whether the Philistine occupation brought with it and left such peculiar characteristics as would be the case with an intrusion of a new civilization. These results will be compared with parallel results from other Palestinian sites. This material will then be available for comparison with the results of discovery elsewhere, and provide a contribution of direct evidence towards the solution of the problem.

3rd June, 1921.

Stratigraphical Sections.

By W. J. PHYTHIAN-ADAMS, M.A., D.S.O., M.C.

1. Six sections were cut in the face of the "Acropolis" Mound for the purpose of determining the stratigraphical horizons of the Ancient City. Of these, four were on the cliff face near the point where Dr. Mackenzie had previously made his observations (Q.S.

Jan., 1913, p. 20 *seq.*), and the remaining two on the Northern Scarp (Field 163).

The sections were cut by steps normally 1 metre long by 50 cm. broad and 50 cm. deep, and the objects found in each step were labelled and placed in separate compartments. At the conclusion of the work the interior cliff face was sketched and the strata fixed before reference was made to the pottery fragments. The agreement between these two may therefore be regarded as fundamental and not as due to any preconceived hypothesis.

The task of working over the fragments was entrusted to me by Professor Garstang. It has been carried out during the winter months, and is now sufficiently advanced to call for a detailed statement.

2. Of the six sections referred to above, only one (and that on the Northern Scarp) has been found to yield a satisfactory result. The cliff face on the sea coast, though carefully denuded of fallen debris before the section proper was begun, showed at all points a hopeless confusion of periods. In one step of section δ Roman and Arab wares lay side by side with a typical sub-Mycenaean fragment and a piece of the familiar "wish-bone" handle bowl. The lower strata of section γ (*i.e.*, those which lay half-way down the cliff) have given us an interesting equation with the Scarp section; but beyond these we have not invoked the dubious help of the sea-coast, where the deep and massive walls of the Crusaders have wrecked the delicate relations of the various layers.

3. We turn then to the evidence of the Northern Scarp, where our first section, for various reasons, was alone of value. The sketch shows the stratigraphy of this part of the Tell and steps to which each layer belongs. The Scarp at this point tumbles sheer for 7·50 metres to the lowest terrace, which in its turn falls over two metres to the bottom of the Wadi Berdawil. The ground level of the top of this terrace is equivalent to the centre of steps 29-31, and it will thus be seen that we had to descend in our sections 2 metres below the surface of the lower terrace before we could strike the virgin sand at the bottom. The terracing which had produced the Scarp had also removed the outer crust of later debris and exposed a fresh undisturbed and reliable section for our investigation.

Beneath steps 13 and 12 an East to West wall of late date came to light, and confined us to a space of less than 1·50 m. between

itself and the perpendicular face of the Scarp. Owing to this intrusion, the evidence of steps 17, 20 and 23 must be regarded as dubious, though it happens, fortunately, that this is of little moment. Below this point the strata were found wholly undisturbed.

4. The history of Askalon (begins at this spot) on a bed of clean sand, overlaid with soft dark loamy soil which is clearly distinguished from the hard clay stratum above it. Pottery fragments were found in these lowest steps (41-43), and already betray the influence of Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean. The culture types remain unchanged until we reach steps 29-31 immediately underlying the stone foundation of the later mud-brick wall. The most conspicuous fragments in this stratum were:—

Step 43—

- (I) Fragment (almost flat in section) from the bottom of a large slightly curved dish. The clay is of fine texture and buff colour with a red slip. The decoration consists of a rolling brown-red band on a ribbon of matt white applied to the slip. Both fabric and decoration appear at present to be unique in Palestine and contrast strikingly with their immediate neighbours at this level.

Step 41—

- (II) Fragments of the familiar Cypriote "wish-bone" handle bowl with the usual ladder decoration (bistre on whitish gray). Most of the fragments are of coarse buff clay, and betray the efforts of the local imitator. (Wish-bone handle, Step 37).
- (III) Two fragments of "Aegean" painted ware, almost identical in type with those found by Dr. Mackenzie at Beth-Shemesh outside the East Grotto (*Annual*, 1911, fig. 14, page 65). They show the "dark reddish-brown decoration on the familiar glazed buff slip" (cf. *Gezer*, II, p. 155).
- (IV) Fragments of "base-ring ware" belonging both to the "bilbil" type of vase (handle of a large jug with central raised rib, Step 33), and to the black and red cyma bowl, figured in *Tell el-Hesi*, Pl. VIII, p. 149. Of this Petrie says: "The outline is more like a metal bowl

than one of pottery" (*ibid.*, p. 45), and indeed the clay itself rings with a hard metallic chink. A fine fragment which shows the complete profile of the bowl was found in Step 22 of the section γ (see above. This was the lowest step of the section, and therefore about halfway down the Tell). Pieces of wish-bone handle bowl occurred with it, and would seem to show that we have here an equation of some importance.

It is, however, very strange to find this early period represented on the coast so high up the cliff face, and subsequent excavations may prove this evidence invalid. Certainly the wish-bone handle and bowl fragments occur at all levels in section γ , and were even found on the summit of the hill with Arab glazed ware, glass and Byzantine lamps.

- (V) Local wares are represented by the top of a one-handed juglet with spout evenly closed and not pinched (Step 42), and by fragments of a shallow dish of coarse porridge clay, specimens of which occurred in Steps 37 and 38, and in γ 20. This ware, which is distinguished by a somewhat unusual "turn-over" rim, ending on the outside face either in a sharp right-angle return or a smoother moulding, has been found at Ain Shems, apparently in its first and second periods. In the Scarp Section it does not appear again. Its gritty texture and metallic shape make it easily recognisable.

- (VI) More curious in this environment is a fragment of bowl-rim of buff clay, painted both inside and out with a symmetrical design of red squares on a black ground. The squares themselves are spotted more or less regularly with small rectangles of black.

Two fragments of this type are now in the Palestine Museum, and seem to have been found at Tell es-Safi. In this case thin black, slightly wavy lines have been drawn in groups of twenty, either vertically or horizontally over the surface of the dull red slip. The effect is less orderly and much less pleasing than in the present examples, but there can be no doubt that the technique itself is identical.

- (b) Steps 29-31 show a transitional stage. The painted ladder ware disappears and red or vermilion loops on red clay take their place. Step 29 contained a fragment of an alabaster vase of XIXth Dynasty type, and the top of a double-handled "pilgrim bottle." It is possible that these may belong to the period of the mud-brick wall above.
- (c) With the stratum which now begins (Steps 28-26), and which fades away gradually into a Hellenistic environment (Steps 8-11), we pass apparently into a new culture.

The technique of the painted wares is now predominantly that of the second period of Ain Shems, the 3rd Semitic of Gezer. The white or greenish white slip of this period had already appeared in Step 31, and fragments showing the familiar black false spiral with red centre are now in evidence (Step 23). The vases represented were of the larger crater order.

The octopus *motif* occurs on a small pyx-like vessel from Step 26, and seems repeated in a more elaborate form on several fragments from the same step, which bear a design in dark brown on greenish white. Here, too, another "pilgrim-bottle" was found, this time intact. It shows faint traces of an original white slip and of some design (not of concentric circles) in a dark dull red.

Thinner cups or bowls of red clay with dark red lines inside and outside the rim or on the sides, and a few fragments of buff ware with dark brown bands, also belong to this stratum. In Step 28 a piece of imitation "wish-bone" bowl survives from the earlier period, but the ladder pattern has given place to a few spiral lines.

- (d) The strata up to and immediately below the pottery level of Steps 8-11 contained nothing characteristic, although the presence of a rude lump of iron and a pocket of greenish clay are to be noted for future guidance.
- (e) In the well-marked stratum above this we have, however, a surer piece of evidence. It was noticed that this stratum alone seemed to continue at the same level along the whole face of the scarp, and very clearly represents the debris of a large but not lofty rubbish heap. At the west end of this layer in our section we found *in situ* broken fragments of the familiar cylindrical U-shaped vase with

rounded base and flat shoulders. Macalister holds this to be a type appearing in the Persian (IVth Semitic) Period, and becoming very common in the Hellenistic (*Gezer*, II, p. 198). In Beth-Shemesh it is a sign of the period of re-occupation.

- (f) Above this point the ground has been so often and so rudely disturbed that any attempt to differentiate strata proved futile. A pit sunk in the field above showed equally that we cannot hope to determine the later periods of occupation by this method. They demand a more extended excavation.

5. To sum up:—

- (I) Two periods in this section seemed to be indicated with considerable certainty.
- (a) The period from the bottom to the level below the mud-brick wall in Steps 26–28.

Here the presence together of the Mycenaean iron glaze ware, of the base ring jugs and cyma bowls, of the wish-bone handle bowls, and, finally, at the top of the XIXth Dynasty alabaster fragment shows that we are dealing with an epoch ranging roughly from 1400 B.C. to 1100 B.C. This dating in Palestine seems confirmed by the evidence of Tell el-Hesi, Gezer and Ain Shems. In the first it is represented by cities (sub IV and V) period; in the second by the latter part of the "Second Semitic" period, and in the third by the first period of the city's history.

Two points may here be noted:—The Scarp Section has revealed none of the earlier pre-Israelite or pre-Semitic stages, which are distinguished by the ledge handle, the flat base and the polished Venetian red vase. It is very probable that the sand stratum at the bottom of the Steps 41–43 may be no more than a deep but local drift, and that beneath this again now and earlier epochs will reveal themselves. On the coast, pottery was certainly discovered down to the sandstone rock some twelve feet below sea-level, but reasons have been advanced already for discounting the force of this evidence.

The general resemblance of this earliest stratum in the Scarp to the first period of Ain Shems has already been

mentioned. The collection of fragments found at the entrance of the East Grotto is particularly remarkable in its similarity to our Askalon types. It contained all the wares specified above (except the alabaster), and in addition fragments of the "turn-over" type described in (IV), (V).

(b) In the pottery stratum of Steps 8-11 we recognize the arrival of Hellenistic influence. This corresponds aptly with the re-occupation period of Ain Shems, and though it does not give us an exact date, permits us to fix with reasonable certainty the duration of the culture immediately underlying it.

(II) That culture appears to have been homogeneous and unbroken. No violent cataclysm is suggested by the presence of ashes or of bricks reddened by fire. If the evidence of this section can be provisionally accepted, a new period opened for Askalon near, or soon after, the close of the XIXth Dynasty, and continued undisturbed until new and much later influences came to the city from the West.

This period at its outset exactly corresponds with the second period of Ain Shems: it arrived at the same moment, and brought with it the same ceramic types; but while in the city of the Shephelah it was rudely broken by hostile invasion and the intrusion of a strange race, at Askalon it escaped these dangers and passed without interruption into the succeeding stage.

To this period and its culture we may, with Dr. Mackenzie, assign the name of "Philistine"; history itself supports the evidence of strata and pottery; and if we must expect in the course of the next season to see this hypothesis modified in its essential details, we can at least go forward with greater confidence and a surer knowledge of the problems which lie before us.
