

Jewish Archaeology

The sixth season of excavations at Tel Beersheba by the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University has been completed and the results have been reported as "impressively successful."

Under the direction of Prof. Yohanan Aharoni, head of the TAU's Department of Archaeology and Ancient Near Eastern Studies, a team of 200 worked for nine weeks at the site of a 3,000-year-old city and uncovered new evidence that Biblical descriptions of structures in that area

LAS VEGAS ISRAELITE
apparently are accurate. Among the findings were a temple site, apparently mentioned in the Second Book of Kings, and a well that possibly had been used by the flocks of Abraham.

Last year, the team discovered dramatic evidence supporting Biblical references to horned altars, which were central to the ancient tradition of people gaining sanctuary in temples. A claim of sanctuary in that period was made by grabbing the horns of the altar. A horned altar was uncovered in the wall of an ancient storehouse, and the discovery was regarded as evidence that supported reference made in the Second Book of Kings to the Jewish monarch Hezekiah having the cult objects destroyed.

That discovery, made in an area where Bedouin tribesmen still roam with flocks, convinced the archaeologists that the rest of the temple remains must be close by, and it was in quest of these anticipated finds that the most recent excavations were carried out.

Opposite a main city gate previously unearthed, the team this year found a large building about 20 yards square, with walls still standing to a height of 15 feet. The plastered walls were still black from the intense fire of an ancient destruction.

The archaeologists, who attribute the building's preservation to its being mostly underground even in ancient times, conjecture that the structure stands in the place of an ancient cultic temple. They reason that the temple had been dismantled and rebuilt for secular purposes, just as the horned altar was used to prop up a wall of the storehouse found last year.

"This is dramatic testimony," Prof. Aharoni said, "to the cultic reform of Hezekiah described in the Bible (II Kings, Chapter 18, Verse 2) when he destroyed all the high places and altars outside Jerusalem."

The theory was further supported by the discovery of a Greek temple from the third or second century B.C., built nearby, apparently preserving the more cultic tradition of the site. Around the walls were found ovens in which sacrifices had been made, along with votive offerings in ivory, bronze, glass, terra-cotta and stone. The archaeologists believe that

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"the great variety of these finds and their countries of origin (such as Egypt) illustrates Beersheba as an international crossroads."
In addition to representatives from Tel Aviv University, prominent members of the Tel Beersheba project included Prof. Anton Schoors of Belgium and a group of Americans -- Dr. Harold Libovich of Texas, Steve Derfler of Minnesota, Legrand Davies of Utah, Prof. B. Boyd of North Carolina, Dr. R. Alexander of Oregon and Hersh Rabinovitch of New York. The team also included many TAU students and volunteers.

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13

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