

Reevaluating the Bronze and Iron Age Ceramic Evidence of Biblical Hebron

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Project Purpose

This purpose and goal of this project is to reexamine the stratigraphy of Tell er-Rumeide (ancient biblical Hebron) to determine if the current understanding is correct or must be revised. The collection of ancient pottery sherds excavated at Tell er-Rumeide by the American Expedition to Hebron (AEH, 1964-1966) is currently available here at BYU, in the custody of Prof. Jeffrey R. Chadwick. While portions of the collection have been examined in recent years, the entire collection has not been reevaluated in the nearly fifty years since the AEH expedition occurred. All ancient periods at Hebron, from the Early Bronze Age through the Early Islamic era, are represented in this unique pottery collection. I, though, propose doing a specific project within the greater span of this collection, namely examining pottery from the Middle Bronze, Late Bronze, and Iron Age periods. Dr. Chadwick, who will reexamine and reevaluate the collection in its entirety, will direct and assist me in that focus. The purpose of my project will be to determine if the current stratigraphic model of Tell er-Rumeide is accurate or needs revision based upon a more sophisticated and modern reading of the evidence.

Project Importance

Tell er-Rumeide is located 20 miles (50 km) southwest of Jerusalem, in the center of the thriving modern Palestinian Arab city of Hebron (also known as el-Khalil). The tell has been positively identified as the site of the ancient biblical city of Hebron, referenced to in various passages of the Old Testament. The main religious shrine in Hebron today is the Tomb of the Patriarchs (also known as the Machpelah Cave or the Ibrahimi Mosque). The ancient tell is located about 1000 meters west of the shrine. In the Old Testament, the city was the place where Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and even King David lived for certain periods of their lives. Hebron played a significant role in the early Israelite story. From the first appearance of Israel in the land of Canaan, Hebron is described as under Israelite control. The first seven years of the reign of King David are described at Hebron (see 2 Samuel 2-5). Since Hebron was such a prominent site in the lives of the biblical patriarchs, and in the life of Israel's most famous king, understanding its archaeological history may lend valuable insight into the understanding of the biblical narratives of those persons, as well as to the secular understanding of the ancient city.

Project Profile

For an Ancient Near Eastern Studies major, such as myself, with a focus in archaeology, it is very difficult to be practically involved with archaeology without traveling to the Middle East. Thus, it is providential and even unique that an opportunity to examine remains of an ancient Near Eastern site exists right here on the BYU campus. The AEH sherd collection is currently located in a lab temporarily set up in the JSB, and easily accessible. Involvement in this project will require a great deal of time for the first six months of 2014. During winter semester, specific lab time will be set aside each week in which I will simultaneously examine the available pottery sherds while being instructed on pottery identification and classification by Prof Jeffrey Chadwick. Dr. Chadwick has significant experience in the analysis of ancient pottery from sites in the land of Israel, having been an active field archaeologist at various sites in Israel for nearly 30 years. For the project, we will examine the finds of each stratigraphic layer, from each excavation area at Hebron, comparing our examination with the fifty year old readings of the original excavator (the late Prof. Phillip C. Hammond). Specifically I will look at the pottery remains associated with the Middle Bronze, Late Bronze, and Iron Age periods. At times, pottery readings in the field can suffer from mistakes or misreading. And after fifty years, a great deal more is known about the ancient pottery styles than was the case when Hammond excavated in the 1960s. Accordingly, we will determine if the pottery may be read and evaluated (dated) differently today than in the

1960s. We will thus decide, through our findings, if any adjustment in the stratigraphic and historic understanding of Hebron is merited.

Anticipated Academic Outcome

The plan is to present the project, and any new understandings gained through it, in a paper to be co-authored and co-presented by myself and Prof. Chadwick at the November 2014 Annual Meeting of the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR) in San Diego as the initial forum. Eventual publication of the paper (as early as 2015) is possible.

Qualifications

Jeffrey R. Chadwick is a Jerusalem Center Professor of Archaeology and Near Eastern Studies at BYU, as well as an Associate Professor of Religious Education. He has nearly 30 years of experience as a research and field archaeologist in Israel, and has excavated at several sites including Jerusalem, Tel Grisa, Tel Miqne (Ekron), and Tell es-Safi (Gath). He wrote his Ph.D. dissertation on the archaeology of Tell er-Rumeide (Hebron). He is currently the senior field archaeologist and director of excavations (in Area F) for the Tell es-Safi/Gath Archaeological Project in Israel (Aren M. Maeir, Bar-Ilan University, overall director). Dr. Chadwick is also a senior fellow at the prestigious W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research in Jerusalem, and serves on the board of trustees of the American Schools of Oriental Research. He was a student of Prof. Phillip C. Hammond, the director of the American Expedition to Hebron, who was also the advisor of his Ph.D. Dr. Hammond, who passed away in 2008, designated Dr. Chadwick to receive custody of all research and physical specimens from the AEH project at Hebron, with the goal of further publication. Dr. Chadwick not only has the specimens necessary for the proposed project, he is also a willing and able advisor.

I am an undergraduate in Ancient Near Eastern Studies. My focus is on the archaeology of that region. Throughout my undergraduate career I have taken numerous history and archaeology classes that have focused on this part of the Near East. At my own expense and initiative, I have participated in two seasons of excavation at Tell es-Safi/Gath. I am thus familiar with archaeological method and artifacts, including pottery from different periods. Starting winter 2014 I will be enrolled in an ANES readings class with Dr. Chadwick, primarily focused on mastering the ceramic typology of the Bronze and Iron Age periods in Israel.

Project Timetable

Winter Semester 2014 – examination and cataloguing of all pottery remains, under direction of Prof. Chadwick [paper proposal to ASOR by Feb. 15 deadline]

Spring/Summer Terms 2014 – Collate data, begin formulation of paper/presentation

Fall Semester 2014 – Complete and refine the paper/presentation. Travel to ASOR Annual Meeting in San Diego in November to present the paper.

Scholarly Sources

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