

EXCAVATIONS AT JERICHO, PALESTINE.

BY HAROLD J. SHEPSTONE.

Few excavations have evoked wider interest among the general public than those which have been carried out on the supposed site of the ancient city of Jericho—that city whose walls, according to the Biblical story, fell so miraculously before the trumpet blasts and shouts of Joshua's army. The excavations were carried out during the winters of 1906-7 and 1907-8 by Dr. Selin, who, although an Austrian, represented a German society, the Deutsche Orient Gesellschaft.

The scene of the excavations is a collection of mounds in the vicinity of the village of Ericha, near the Dead Sea. The mounds were attacked from five different points practically simultaneously. The "finds" have been remarkable. It was not long before the exterior wall of the lost city was encountered at a depth of only 8 feet below the surface. The excavators were astonished at the technical excellence of the construction. The wall consisted of three parts. The natural rock foundation is overlaid with a filling of loam and fine gravel, four feet or so deep, upon which a sloping rubble wall, with a marked batter, is superimposed to a height of 20 feet, the breadth being from $6\frac{1}{2}$ to 8 feet. The wall is built of well-laid rubble, which becomes finer toward the top. Numerous blocks are partially employed for the lower part of the wall.

Every interstice is most carefully filled in, so as to offer no advantages to the implements of destruction of a hostile force. Finally, upon this imposing foundation the fortification wall proper rests, built of clay bricks. In one place this part of the wall reaches to a height of 8 feet, but it would seem to have been considerably higher. The whole must have been a most striking structure, which dominated the whole plain without the city and must have been visible for miles.

The only advantage which, in point of technical perfection, modern construction possesses over the walls of Jericho is the use of mortar, which was unknown to these early architects. The walls are estimated to have extended 900 yards, of which 450 yards have already been laid bare with the aid of 200 workmen employed by the Society. To the north, the fortifications are breached by a large heap of rubbish, which would seem to indicate that an attacking army must have penetrated here some time.

Because these may have been the very ramparts that confronted Joshua's hosts, excavations have attracted not a little interest. Here it must be borne in mind that the site of ancient Jericho is almost entirely a matter of conjecture, and the name of the town—"The City of the Moon"—makes traditional evidence of little value, because it is more than probable that a number of cities were called by the same name. If the Bible story is to be accepted, we have here a definite announcement that the city was razed, whereas the walls discovered are, it appears, in a singularly good state. It is interesting to learn that the wall formed a strong rampart around what was undoubtedly one of the most ancient cities of Palestine. Some interesting relics have been found. They include lamps, plates, cups, needles, weights, mortars, and mills of bronze and stone, some of very rough and primitive handwork, and others very finely executed.

In the inner city remains of rows of houses have been uncovered. Below the clay floors of some of these were found the bodies of children buried in jars. Ancient Hebrew inscriptions are found on some of the dwellings.

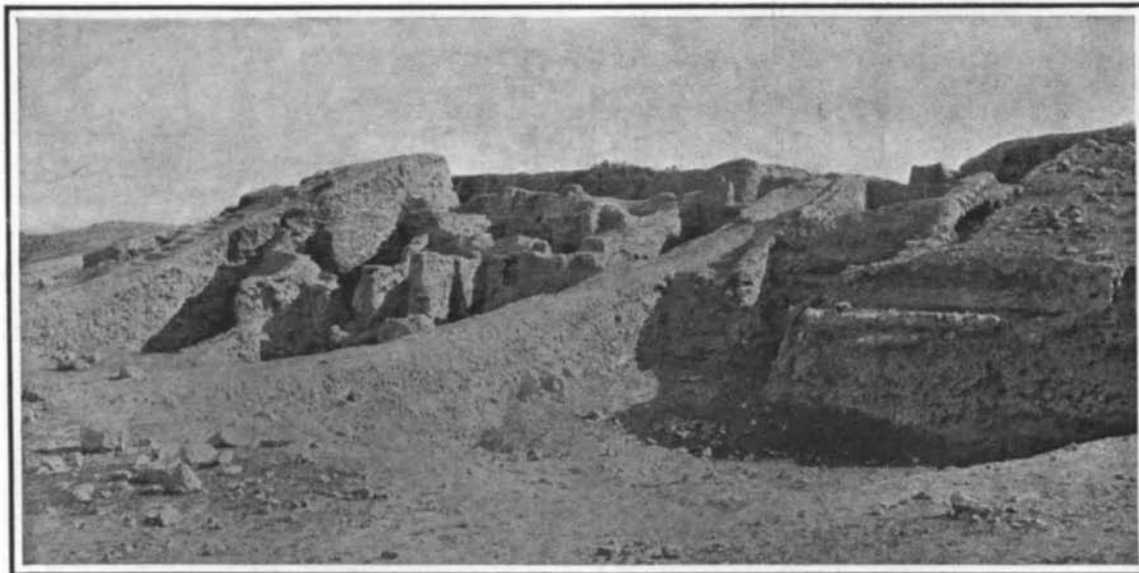
The interior or inner wall has also been unearthed for a considerable distance. This, like the outer wall, was crowned by strong corner towers. On the northern slope of the city, without the walls, numerous remains of Canaanite houses were discovered. Some of these leaned against the old city wall, and recalled, as one writer points out, the "Home of Rahab," in which Joshua's spies took refuge. The partition walls of clay were in many cases still standing, and even ovens and a drainage canal were still to be traced. The excavators believe that this slope was inhabited from the end of 2000 B. C. up to the last few centuries before Christ. At five different places flights of broad stone steps were discovered, but they are held to belong to a later time when the city lay deserted, and the once inhabited higher parts were used for gardens and vineyards.

Jericho was thrice rebuilt. The first city, believed to have been destroyed in 1451 B. C., was replaced by Hiel in 918 B. C., in the reign of Ahab; and this, having been looted by Simon, slave to Herod, gave way to the one built by Archelaus, son of Herod. The final destruction was the work of Vespasian in 68 A. D.

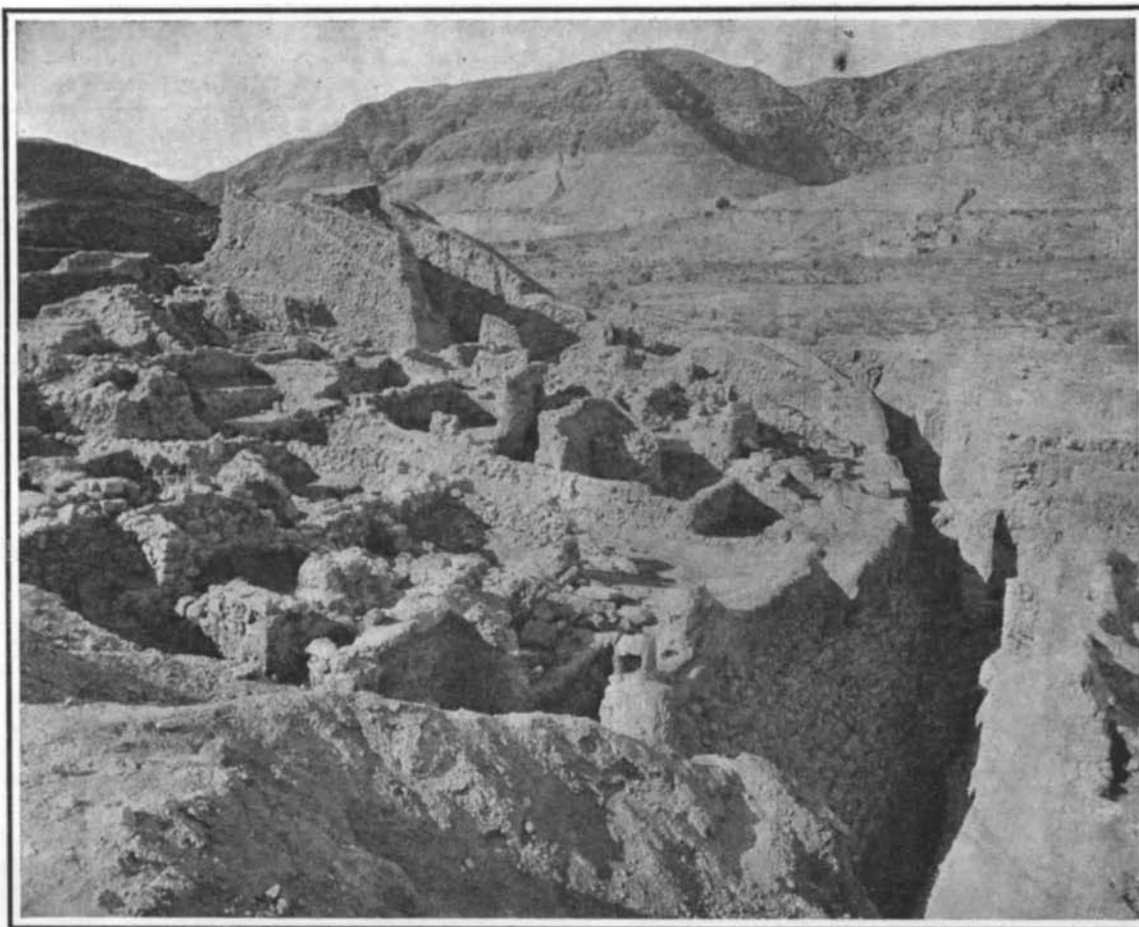
There was also discovered what must have been a neighboring village, consisting of some fifty dwelling houses. It was, however, evidently erected about 700 B. C. One of these excavated houses was particularly well preserved. It contained a courtyard open to the air, with a bench, a long room, and a kitchen opening on to the yard, in which the great water tun still stood in its accustomed place.

Although the excavators have been rewarded with rich finds there is still much work to do, and one is glad to note that the work is to be resumed during the present spring. It is hoped then that Dr. Selin and his experts will be able to determine the epochs represented—Canaanite, Israelite, Jewish.

During the last quarter of a century many interesting archaeological discoveries have been made in Palestine. Unfortunately, research in the most promising districts, such as Jerusalem and Nineveh for example, is to a large extent impossible, because of the buildings upon the ancient sites.

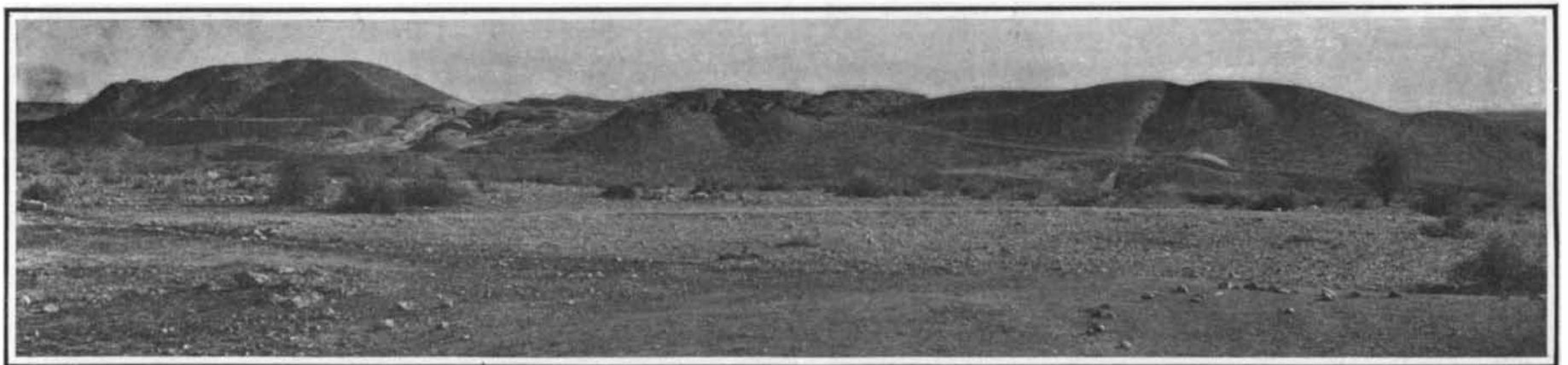


General view of the excavations at Jericho, Palestine.



The deep excavation on the right discloses the old wall of Joshua's time. This rampart extends around the ruins and has been uncovered for some distance. The foothills of the Judean mountains are seen in the distance.

Unearthing the Biblical city of Jericho.



View from the west of the great mound which covers the ancient city of Jericho.