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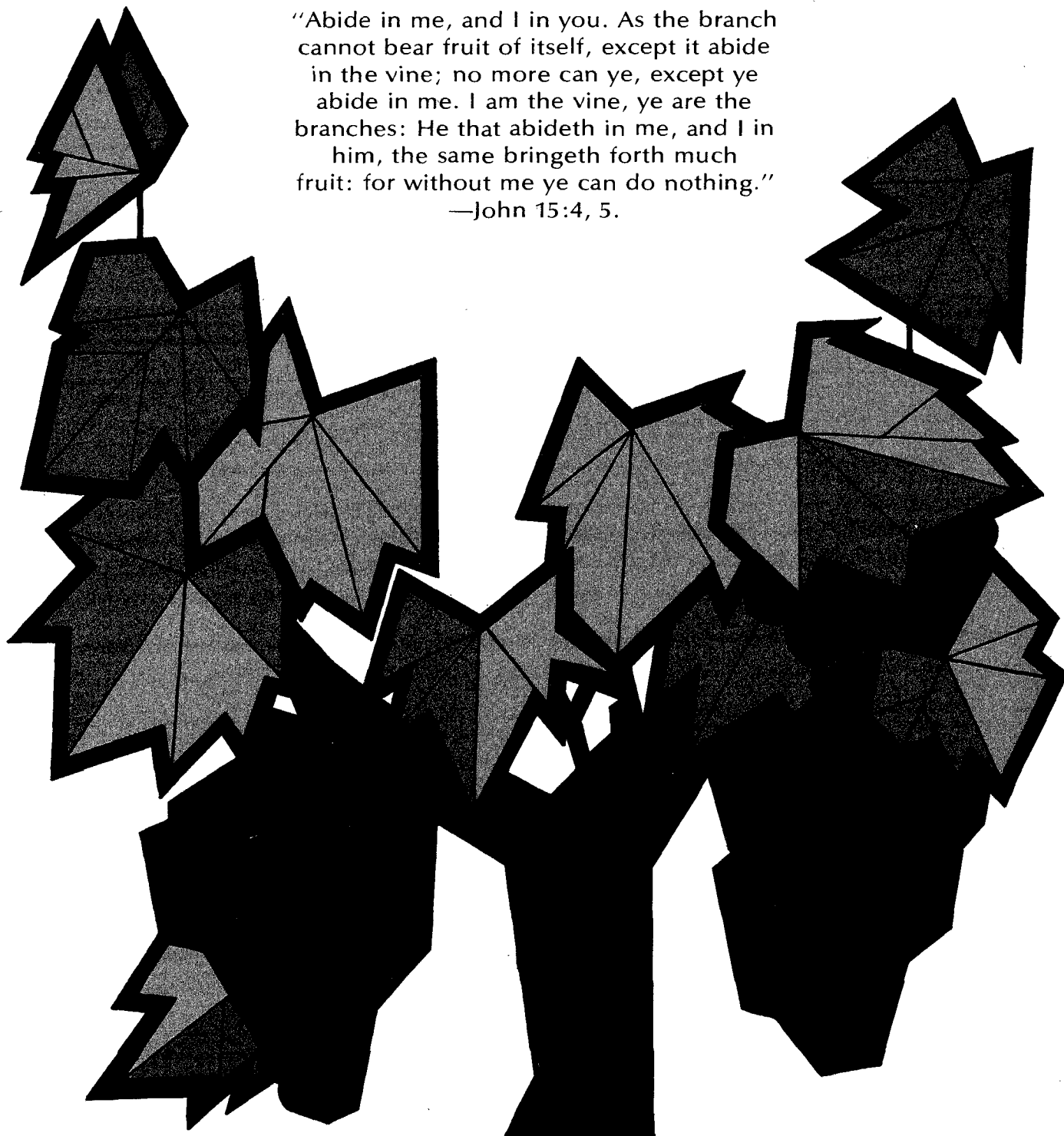
Review

OCTOBER 9, 1975

ADVENT REVIEW AND SABBATH HERALD ♦ GENERAL CHURCH PAPER OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."

—John 15:4, 5.



Life at Ancient Heshbon

A rare find was a long metal needle preserved in its entirety.

The romance of archeology grows when one imagines a mother in the time of Jeremiah using this needle to sew her family's clothes.

By LAWRENCE T. GERATY

“WHAT WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT thing you found?” is the most common question that people ask of an archeologist when he returns from an expedition. The inquirer usually recalls pictures of objects from the tomb of Pharaoh Tutankhamen, or of the Royal Cemetery at Ur, or perhaps even of the Dead Sea scrolls. But if one were to look for museum objects that have intrinsic value apart from their historical context, one certainly would not choose to dig in Palestine, whose peoples throughout history have been relatively poor when compared with the inhabitants of Egypt or Mesopotamia. Furthermore, the more humid climate of Palestine helps to destroy what was once buried.

Of course, the truth is that archeologists at most modern excavations do not dig for objects in the sense that many did at old expeditions. Today's objectives have more to do with discovering a site's history and environment rather than its silver and gold. All the same, we are always delighted with any objects that are discovered in the course of our work, and there are always many. In 1974, at Heshbon, we registered more than 400 that we considered valuable.

Objects of utility were most common. In metal, there were coins, ax heads, knives, spatulas, saws, hooks, plow points, nails, tacks, keys, buckles, needles, pins of different kinds, and fibulae. In stone, there were mortars, pestles, bowls, millstones, flint instruments, whetstones, weights, and mosaic fragments. In bone or ivory were buttons, needles, spatulas, and pins. From clay, we found spindle whorls, loom weights, figurines, and many whole pots, such as cooking pots, bowls, jugs, platters, lids, and lamps.

Other objects ranged from weapons of war such as

sling stones and arrowheads to articles of jewelry, many showing artistic craftsmanship, such as earrings, finger rings, bracelets, pendants, beads, gems, mirrors, and various types of glass vessels.

When carefully excavated according to the stratigraphic method described in an earlier article, the context and dating of all these objects can be determined. All items then play a role in illustrating the way people lived in the various periods represented. To demonstrate what we mean, let us take some specific examples from the 1974 season, beginning with the earliest occupational evidence at *Tell Hesbân* and proceeding to the most recent.

As has already been mentioned, the earliest period represented at Heshbon is the Iron Age or roughly the era of the Israelite monarchy. It begins in the time of the Judges in the twelfth century B.C. and ends with the fall of Jerusalem in the sixth century B.C. Objects preserved from this early period are mostly ceramic. Edward Lugenbeal of the Geoscience Research Institute at Andrews University and James Sauer of the American Center of Oriental Research in Jordan have already published reports on much of the pottery. In addition to pots and vessels of daily life, we also found ceramic zoomorphic figurines that are characteristic of the Iron Age. These small models of animals may have had a religious use, such as votive offerings to a god, though they may also have been utilitarian or merely decorative.

Each season at Heshbon has produced at least one important Iron Age ostrakon (a broken potsherd with writing). One contains names of persons at Heshbon. These names are not only West Semitic but also Babylonian and Egyptian, showing the cosmopolitan nature of the community in the sixth century B.C. Another ostrakon mentions people from Edom. From a third ostrakon we learn of the distribution from Heshbon's royal stores of foodstuffs, beef and mutton, grain and wine, as well as money and spicery, to the personal household of the king, to his courtiers, and to others to whom the crown was under obligation. A fourth ostrakon found in 1974 has yet to be deciphered.

These ostraca are significant also for their script and language. We now know, for instance, that Ammonite, the language spoken and written at Heshbon in the sixth century B.C., was a South Canaanite dialect closely related to Phoenician and Hebrew rather than an Aramaic dialect as at one time had been assumed. This makes sense, of course, considering the Biblical account of the origin of the Ammonites (Gen. 19:38).

Another rare Iron Age find was a two-and-three-quarter-inch-long metal needle preserved from its point to its eye. Such a delicate object from 2,500 years ago rarely survives, at least all in one piece. Thus the romance of archeology grows when one imagines a mother in the time of Jeremiah using this needle to sew her family's clothes.

Like so many other towns in Palestine during the sixth to fourth centuries B.C., Heshbon, too, seems to have been abandoned. In fact, it apparently was not resettled until the second/first centuries B.C., probably by the Maccabees. From this late Hellenistic period we found about 35 pyramid-shaped loom weights. Made of clay, they probably hung on each side of the loom to keep the fabric taut.

The silt fill in a 20-cubic-yard circular pool from the

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same period produced a clearly inscribed handle originally belonging to a wine jar imported to Palestine from the Greek island of Rhodes. The Greek inscription mentions Aristeidas, a name we know belonged to a Rhodian priest both in the early third century B.C. and in the early second century B.C. From other ceramic and numismatic evidence on the *tell*, we know our inscription must come from the latter century and thus refer to the Aristeidas of the second century B.C.

Excessive Building During Roman Period

During the Roman period, when Heshbon was known as Eshbus, from the time of Jesus through the early Christian centuries, extensive building activity must have taken place, since widespread evidence of it has been found. The workmanship in the public and private buildings described in last week's article suggests a higher standard of living under Roman rule. But we were reminded that not all was peace and light. We discovered a lead flogging head, still covered with sharp points that could inflict serious wounds if applied in the Roman manner.

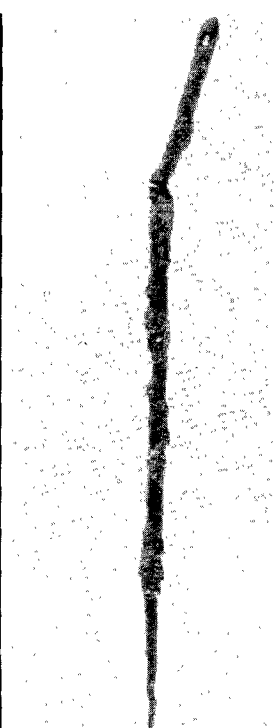
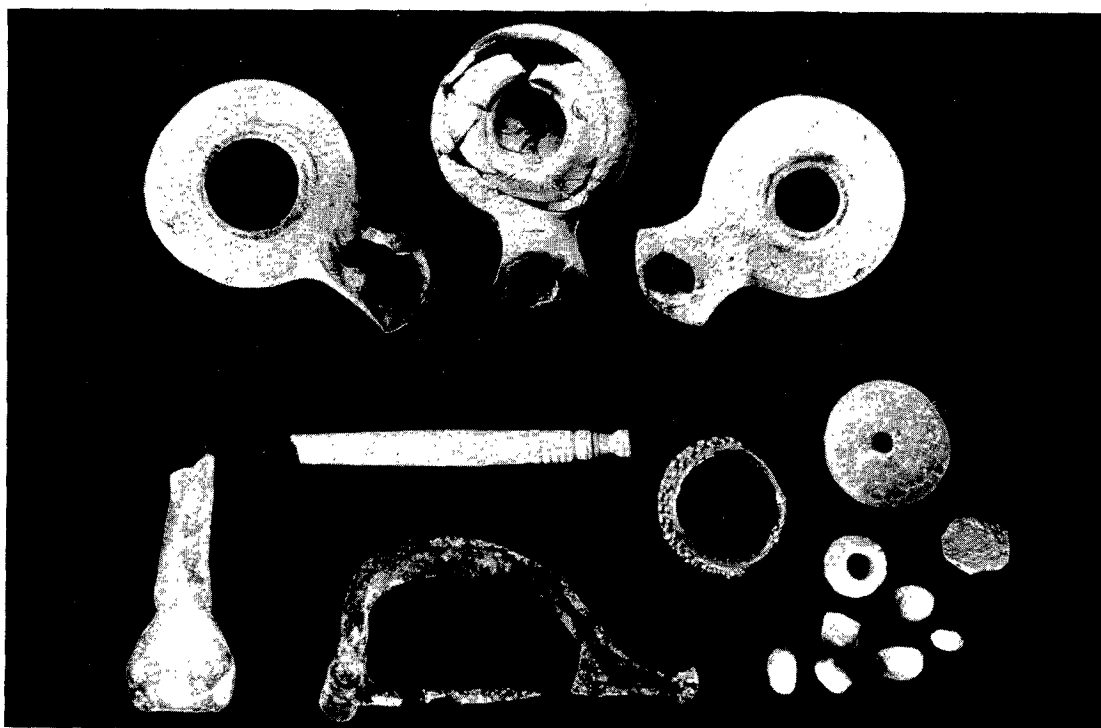
Our Roman coins depict another aspect of Roman rule in that part of the empire. One such coin, known as "the widow's mite" from the story in Mark 12 and Luke 21, was actually minted in Judea during the procuratorship of Pontius Pilate. We found several coins of Aretas IV, the Nabataean king mentioned by Paul in the story of his escape from Damascus (2 Cor. 11: 32, 33). And another coin of interest to Seventh-day Adventists depicts Constantine the Great, the emperor noted for his Sunday law.

Many of our objects illustrating life in Roman times came from tombs. One such tomb, which was carefully excavated this past summer, lay across the valley to the west of the *tell*. We found a unique double-spouted black Herodian lamp with a high central (broken) ring handle, lying on the tomb's forecourt immediately in

front of the entrance, which was closed with a rectangular stone and caked shut. The lamp's ware and artistry attest to the high level of craftsmanship in the Palestine of New Testament times. Though two (virtually) whole cooking pots were found in their original places on the unrobbed tomb's floor inside, to our great surprise no skeletal remains, either whole or decomposed, were discovered. This unexpected phenomenon (absence of bones but presence of virtually whole pots, damaged enough only to make them of no practical value) could point to a hitherto unknown Roman cultic ritual practiced for the dead.

Another important early Roman burial site was discovered to the northwest of the mound at our site G.10; it was a family tomb sealed with a rolling stone, a tomb similar to the one in which Jesus was buried, according to the account in the Gospels. Like the first rolling-stone tomb discovered in 1971 in our Cemetery F, this one, too, had been broken into by modern robbers. In fact, an unexploded hand grenade found just inside the robber hole may offer mute testimony to the "unstratigraphic" method used by tomb robbers! Though they left the interior in disarray, careful excavation produced such items as a beautiful gold earring, a perfectly preserved bronze fibula (the forerunner of our safety pin), a glass bottle, three Herodian clay lamps, and a Nabataean coin dated to the reign of Rabbel II (A.D. 71-106). This dating suggests, despite the opinions of some, that this type of tomb may also postdate the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

This argument may be bolstered by the architecture of the rock-cut tomb, which appears to be typologically more advanced than the 1971 tomb: vaulted ceiling, "picture" molding around the walls, isosceles-triangle lamp niches within circles on the walls, and the mixture of *loculi* (deep rectangular burial chambers) and *arcosolia* (shallow arched burial chambers). Another interesting feature of the new tomb was the fact that the



Among the objects found in rolling-stone tomb G. 10 were three Herodian lamps, a glass bottle, an ivory pin, a bronze fibula (safety pin), a gold earring, a loom weight, a Nabataean coin, and several beads. At right is a 2,500-year-old sewing needle preserved in its entirety.

rolling stone's track was cut entirely out of solid rock in contrast with the 1971 tomb, where the outside wall of the track was artificially built up. So far, these two tombs at Heshbon are the only known representatives of the rolling-stone type east of the Jordan River.

From human skeletal remains, our physical anthropologists will be able to tell us much about Roman man. Of course, not all corpses were buried in such elegant tombs; one factor determining the type of burial must certainly have been a person's personal wealth. In our sounding at *Umm es-Sarab*, the small hill at the head of the *Wadi Hesbân* described in last week's article, two articulated adult Roman burials—one male, the other female—were found in the soil above a blocked rock-cut recess containing the remains of a young child.

The most noteworthy architecture on the mound from the fourth to the seventh centuries A.D., or Byzantine period, is the basilica-type structure in our Area A, excavated largely in previous seasons. Though there had been numerous indications that the structure was undoubtedly a Christian church, the first real proof came in 1974, when we discovered in a reused position a finely carved cross in one of the stone slabs. The discovery of that symbol somehow tied us closer to our Christian brothers and sisters who worshiped our Lord there at Heshbon 1,500 years ago!

Another Byzantine object worthy of note is a small Greek ostrakon found in our Area C. Unfortunately, it is broken and contains only two and a half Greek letters, possibly the genitive ending of a proper name such as "John."

Two beautiful glass seal impressions came from Umayyad (early Arab) contexts dated about the eighth century A.D. Each contains a short inscription in a finely executed early Arabic script. After this period, Heshbon was for some reason abandoned till after the Crusades in the twelfth century A.D., when it was again settled by Arabs, this time in the Ayyübid/Mamlük periods. A number of interesting ceramic and stone inscriptions date to this medieval era.

10,000 Bones

In addition to these objects that we have described, about 23,000 potsherds, more than 1,000 glass fragments, more than 10,000 bones, and hundreds of scientific samples were registered. When all this data has been adequately studied, we will know considerably more about life at ancient Heshbon.

A further question that many ask is, "What happens to all the objects you discover?" The Department of Antiquities of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has a generous policy with regard to finds made on a bona-fide archeological expedition. At the end of the dig, government representatives choose the best and most unusual objects to complement the collection of their national archeological museum. This is as it should be, since what we find is a part of the country's historical heritage. But everything else they return to the expedition's sponsoring institution, in this case, Andrews University.

In 1974 they kept only about 30 of the more than 400 objects registered, and they gave us all the sherds, glass, bones, and scientific samples. After publication, these items will remain the property of Andrews University and many will be on permanent display at our archeological museum. That way, as students, ministers,

and friends visit the museum, they may be able to catch, at least secondarily, the atmosphere of ancient times, which one of our 1974 staff members expressed as follows:

"My contribution to the dig seems very small in comparison to the benefits I derived from taking part in it. I have come away with an appreciation and respect for the past that cannot be learned from a textbook. To see the artifacts and architecture which various periods of history have produced is to begin to understand the human beings who lived in those periods. I gained respect for the skills of men who could engineer and execute complex water systems, build lasting walls, and create temples to symbolize their beliefs—all in a land where survival against the elements is an everyday concern. I came to understand that the hopes and fears of today have been echoed for many generations and that the destruction of one society is often the foundation of another—not always better, but always stronger. The textbooks can tell you these things, but they cannot let you touch them."

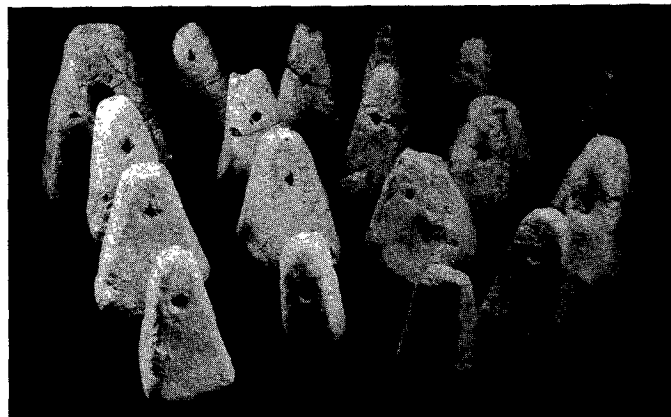
That the 1974 expedition to *Tell Hesbân* has had important archeological results will be clear to the readers of this series of articles. In the light of eternity, however, perhaps other benefits will be of greater import. An Adventist school principal who participated in the dig, wrote, "As a result of dwelling in the Holy Land for some seven weeks, my faith in the history of the Bible and the whole Biblical record gained a firmer foundation."

A non-Adventist missionary staff member admitted, "I personally tried to find out and understand as much as I could about Seventh-day Adventists. In the process I learned to appreciate them very much and was impressed with the Christian love they showed the rest of us. I was impressed with their emphasis on what I too believe to be basic in Christianity."

Another non-Adventist staff member agreed, "Never have I been more impressed with a group of people. The Christian men and women I met were more sincere, more secure, and more concerned than previous acquaintances. These people along with the lands of God's chosen people made my summer not only a learning experience but a spiritual one also."

As we prepare for our fifth season of excavation at Heshbon in the summer of 1976, our prayer is that it, too, will be significant not only for history, but for eternity. □

Concluded



A group of Hellenistic loom weights were discovered in Areas A and D.