

News From Israel

Richard Elofer

An Ultra Orthodox at the Head of the Antiquities Authority

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu plans to change the Antiquities Authority director, General Amir Drori, to a man from the Haredi parties and thus increase their influence on the Authority. The Haredies are unhappy about the archaeological excavations in Israel, particularly when bones are involved. The religious parties wish to control every excavation in Israel because they believe that to move Jewish bones is a profanation. This issue is very new in Israel because for the Antiquities Authority until four years ago the question at issue was not "Who is a Jew?" but "What is an antiquity?" Israel's Antiquity Law describes an antiquity as any object made by man before the year 1700 C.E. and any zoological or botanical remains before the year 1300 C.E. And when archaeologists discovered human bones, they would take them to a laboratory for cleaning and study.

To protest against the Prime Minister's plan, some members of the Knesset and demonstrators (workers from Antiquities Authority in Israel) smashed clay urns in front of the Knesset on Wednesday, July 1, to symbolize the "end of archaeology." In fact, if the religious parties take control of excavations in Israel, it will mean less freedom for the archaeologists.

Discovery on Ancient City of David

Employees working on Monday, July 22, in the City of David uncovered a fortified wall from the Middle Bronze Period in an area believed to have been outside the city's defense. Dr. Ronny Reich has directed these excavations in Jerusalem during past years and discovered near the Gihon Spring a new source of water. This discovery shows that the sophisticated water system heretofore attributed to the conquering Israelites predated them by eight centuries and was even more sophisticated than imagined. The entire system was built as a single complex by Canaanites in the Middle Bronze Period, around 1800 B.C.E. "We have to rethink all our concepts about the City of David that were formed over the last century," said Dr. Reich. It is presumed that the water system was still functioning when the city, inhabited by the Jebusites, was captured by David about 1000 B.C.E., according to the Bible.

The "Candelabra of Peace" at Ben Gurion Airport

A menorah sculpture more than five meters high and based on a design by Salvador Dali was dedicated Tuesday, July 22, at Ben Gurion Airport. The name of this menorah is "The Candelabra of Peace." French art publisher Jean-Paul Delcourt acquired the copyright for the design of the menorah

to mark Israel's 50th anniversary. According to Delcourt, Dali had created the design to show his admiration for the Jewish people. The dedication was attended by the Tourism Minister and the Ben Gurion Airport director.

A Bill Against Missionaries

For several years, religious parties in the Knesset have fought and voted against the Christian churches in Israel. The last stage was to present in the Knesset a bill which calls for serious sanctions against missionary activity in Israel. It passed a preliminary reading on Wednesday, May 20. This bill calls for a three-year prison sentence or NIS 50,000 fine for anyone found guilty of "preaching with the intent of causing another person to change his religion" even without distribution of printed material.

The bill was supported by 37 coalition Members of the Knesset, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his ministers, and was opposed by 28 opposition Members of the Knesset. Before this law becomes a regular law in Israel, it needs to be voted three times in the Knesset. The explanation of this bill is, "In recent years missionary activity has increased to worrying proportions. This is particularly evident among youth and new immigrants."