

Gibeon expedition records

1033

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University of Pennsylvania, Penn Museum Archives

August 2009

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Summary Information

Repository	University of Pennsylvania: Penn Museum Archives
Creator	Pritchard, James B. (James Bennett), 1909-1997
Title	Gibeon expedition records
Call number	1033
Date [inclusive]	1956-1964
Extent	6 linear feet
Language	English
Abstract	<p>James Pritchard, first Curator of Biblical Archaeology, Professor of Religious Thought, Associate Director (1967-1976), and Director (1976-1977) at the University of Pennsylvania Museum, conducted his primary fieldwork in three sites in the Near East. Of these, locating the site of Ancient Gibeon (El-Jib) in Jordan was perhaps Pritchard's most notable accomplishment. He and his team conducted five seasons of fieldwork here, discovering three prominent architectural features: a tunnel, pool, and the city wall. The archival records for these excavations consist six linear feet of field notes, reports, a field diary, correspondence, object catalogues, drawings, photographs and a photographic catalogue, an annotated map, publication notes, and financial records.</p>

Cite as:

[Item name]. Box [Box number]. Gibeon expedition records. Penn Museum Archives. Accessed [Date]

accessed].

Biography/History

Locating the site of Ancient Gibeon (El-Jib) in Jordan was perhaps James Pritchard's most notable accomplishment. This identification was made based on the discovery of the city name in Hebrew script on the handles of wine-storage jars found at the site. Pritchard conducted research at ancient Gibeon (El-Jib) for five field seasons from 1956-1962 with the hope of further linking the archaeological remains found at the site with events mentioned in the Bible. In total, ancient Gibeon is mentioned 43 times in the Bible and is repeatedly described as the scene of dramatic events. For example, the Bible depicts how the people of Gibeon deceived Joshua, obtained a peace treaty from him, and ultimately saved their city from the same destruction endured by other cities such as Jericho and Ai. Further events included Joshua's command that "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon" during a battle with the Amorite Kings, as well as a tournament between the rival forces of Joab and Abner that took place at the "pool at Gibeon." Until Pritchard decided to excavate this site in the 1950's, two primary theories regarding the archaeological site present at modern day El-Jib prevailed. The first was put forward by an American explorer, Edward Robinson, who proposed that because of El-Jib's location and the similarity in sound between the Arabic "Jib" and the Hebrew "Gibeon," the archaeological site at El-Jib must be the location of ancient Gibeon. The second theory, postulated by the German biblical scholar Professor Albrecht Alt of Leipzig, argued that the archaeological site at El-Jib was instead the biblical city of Beeroth. Despite the disagreement regarding the identity of this ancient site, there was no doubt of its importance. Its size, a fifty-meter mound over 16 acres, marked it as one of the larger cities of ancient Palestine.

In 1956, Pritchard began an exploratory expedition at El-Jib. Funded by the University Museum and a grant from the Pew Foundation, and armed with a scientific staff of nine, seven other men who had previously excavated at Jericho and Dhiban, and another seventy local men, Pritchard was faced with the task of determining a viable dig location with no above-ground architectural markers. The expedition began with Trench III, located in an area immediately north of the mound and near the spring that feeds the present-day village of El-Jib. Pritchard postulated correctly that occupation, at any period, would be located near the water source.

Multiple important discoveries were made during the five field seasons at Gibeon, including three prominent architectural features: the tunnel, the pool, and the city wall. The tunnel allowed access to a protected reservoir during times of siege when the city occupants could block the outside entrance to the cavern reservoir and exclusively use a tunnel extending from the reservoir to the interior city square. Provisions were made to facilitate this process; grooves were cut into the sides and floor of the tunnel entrance so that stones could be dropped quickly to barricade the outside opening.

The pool at Gibeon is a roughly round shape with a maximum diameter of 11.5 meters. There is a staircase running along the side of the pool that contains 42 steps, the first 10 of which show significant wear and may indicate where the natural water level fell. No surface water source was found for the pool and Pritchard concluded that the pool was filled either through a subterranean spring source or through slave labor. Because of the massive task of emptying the pool fill and the restriction of work space in this area, Pritchard split his work crew into two shifts of 40 men excavating in shifts from 5:00 A.M. to 12:00

P.M. and then from 12:00 P.M. to 6:30 P.M. It was from the archaeological materials found in the pool that Pritchard was able to definitively determine the identity of the ancient site at El-Jib. Jar handles were found in the pool fill that contained, in 7th-8th century Hebrew script, the name "Gibeon" as well as the name and address of the citizens who owned to materials.

Finally, Pritchard also found evidence for the city's primary defense system-the city wall. The city wall was laid on bedrock and had a width of 3.5 meters. An inner wall was then built which widened the defensive structure to 8 meters. It is probable that the city wall dates to the 8th century.

James B. Pritchard was born in Louisville, KY on October, 4, 1909. He was educated at Ashbury College (BA, 1930), Drew University (BD, 1935), and finally, the University of Pennsylvania (PhD, 1942). His subsequent academic focus involved the relationship between archaeological remains and biblical studies. His professional positions included: the Crozer Theological Seminary (1942-1954), the Church Divinity School of the Pacific (1954-1962), and the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, at which he held the positions of the first Curator of Biblical Archaeology, Professor of Religious Thought, Associate Director (1967-1976), and Director (1976-1977).

James Pritchard's primary fieldwork was sponsored by the University of Pennsylvania Museum and included three sites in the Near East dating from the Early Bronze Age to the Byzantine Period, including ancient Gibeon (El-Jib) and Tell es Sa'idiyeh in Jordan, and ancient Sarepta (Sarafand) in Lebanon. After his retirement from the University of Pennsylvania Museum in 1978, the Museum endowed a chair in his honor (The James B. Pritchard Chair for Biblical Archaeology and Related Fields). James Pritchard died on January 1, 1997.

Scope and Contents

The archival records for these excavations consist of field notes, reports, a field diary, correspondence, object catalogues, drawings, photographs and a photographic catalogue, an annotated map, publication notes, and financial records. Please also see the records of the excavations at Sarepta, Lebanon and Tell es-Sa'Idiyeh, for other materials by James Pritchard.

Administrative Information

University of Pennsylvania, Penn Museum Archives

August 2009

Finding aid prepared by Bianca Buccitelli.

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Controlled Access Headings

CORPORATE NAME(S)

- University of Pennsylvania. Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

FORM/GENRE(S)

- Card catalogs
- Correspondence
- Field notes
- Photographic prints

PERSONAL NAME(S)

- Pritchard, James B. (James Bennett), 1909-1997

SUBJECT(S)

- Antiquities
 - Archaeological expeditions
 - Archaeology and biblical studies
 - Excavations (Archaeology)
-

Selected Bibliography

Museum Monograph: 1959, "Hebrew Inscriptions and Stamps from Gibeon." James B. Pritchard. 32 pp.
12 figs

- Museum Monograph: 1961, "The Water System at Gibeon." James B. Pritchard. viii + 34 pp. 48 figs.
- Museum Monograph: 1963, "The Bronze Age Cemetery at Gibeon." James B. Pritchard. x + 123 pp. 100 figs.
- Museum Monograph: 1964, "Winery, Defenses, and Soundings at Gibeon." James B. Pritchard. vii + 85 pp. 100 figs.
- The University Museum Bulletin: Vol. 21, No. 1, 1957. "Discovery of the Biblical Gibeon." James B. Pritchard. 25 pp. 22 ill. Map.
- The University Museum Bulletin: Vol. 22, No. 2, 1958. "Second Excavation at Gibeon." James B. Pritchard. 13 pp. 10 ill. Map/
- Expedition: Vol. 2, No. 1, 1959. "The Wine Industry at Gibeon: 1959 Discoveries." James B. Pritchard. 9 pp. 15 ill. Map.
- Expedition: Vol. 3, No. 4, 1961. "The Bible Reports on Gibeon." James B. Pritchard. 8 pp. 9 ill. Map.
- Expedition: Vol. 5, No. 1, 1962. "Civil Defense at Gibeon." James B. Pritchard. 7 pp. 16 ill. Map.

Collection Inventory

CORRESPONDENCE AND REPORTS 1955-1964.

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Correspondence, 1955-1956.	1
Correspondence, 1957.	1
Correspondence, 1958.	1
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Field Notes, Smith (LVE 138).	2

Field Notes, Asia Halaby (Tomb Notes), 1960.	2
Field Notes, Area 28, 1962.	2
Field Notes, Tombs.	2
Field Notes, Arranged for Publication.	2
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Control Field Notebook 1956 (Jean Johnson).	3
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