

From the Archives: G. Herbert Livingston and the Archaeology of Ai

In the history of biblical archaeology, there is always a desire to connect some archaeological location with a specific name and event recorded in scripture. The city of Ai, which was destroyed by Joshua in Joshua 7 and 8, was one such location.¹ Early scholar, Edward Robinson (1794-1863), thought that Ai could be found at Et-Tell or Khirbet Haijah, in part because of a similar meaning in the ancient and current Arabic names. In the 1920's archaeologist William Foxwell Albright set out to prove Robinson correct. Evidence of a fortified city was found which encouraged further excavations. From 1964-1976 Joseph A. Calloway of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky conducted a series of excavations at Et-Tell, leading a consortium of schools with professors and graduate students.² Dr. Calloway invited Asbury Theological Seminary to join with the consortium for the 1966 and 1968 seasons of the dig. Asbury's professor of Old Testament, G. Herbert Livingston (1916-2012), who taught from 1953 to 1987, was invited along.





G. Herbert Livingston and his Archaeological Teaching Collection

According to his memoirs, Dr. Livingston notes, “The fee charged for each person provided by the seminary would be three thousand (\$3,000) dollars. Room and board would be provided by the funds supporting the ‘dig,’ but travel expenses would be the responsibility of the person or persons who accept a place on the staff that would number about eighteen. A number of artifacts found during the summer would be given to the seminary.”²³ In due time, G. Herbert Livingston’s teaching collection of artifacts would become part of the G. Herbert Livingston Collection in the B.L. Fisher Library Archives and Special Collections, and this is how artifacts from the 1966 excavations at Et-Tell would wind up at Asbury Theological Seminary.





Clay Vessel from Tomb F8 (1700-1550 BCE)

The fortified city would turn out to be a fortified city from the Early Bronze Age (3100-2400 BCE), but from that time till an Israelite village from 1,200 to 1,000 BCE, there was no evidence of a city existing at the time of Joshua's conquest on Canaan. While scholars still accept Et-Tell as the biblical site of Ai, there are numerous theories about the discrepancy. Some feel the ruins of the older fortified city may have led to the attribution of the ruins to Joshua in popular stories, which became part of scripture, or perhaps people from the nearby town of Bethel inhabited the ruins of Ai at the time of the conquest. Others think archaeologists need to look elsewhere for the biblical ruins of Ai.⁴





Amphora for Perfume, Unguent, or Medication from Tomb F8 (1700-1550 BCE)

During the dig at Et-Tell in 1966 it was decided to open a new site at Khirbet Khudriya about two and a half kilometers east of Et-Tell, because it had been mentioned as a previous possibility for the city of Ai in earlier reports. This excavation was labeled as Site F, but it revealed little more than a number of isolated tombs and the remains of a Byzantine church or monastery. There were 15 tombs found at Site F, with 12 of them from the Late Hellenistic to Byzantine period. However, one Middle Bronze (1700-1550 BCE) tomb was located by a farmer plowing his fig orchard.⁵ The artifacts in the G. Herbert Livingston collection come from two of these tombs: Tomb F3, which dates from the Byzantine period (AD330-638) and Tomb F8, the Middle Bronze Age tomb uncovered by the farmer. In his memoirs, Livingston writes,

...another group of teams were excavating a site one mile east of Deir Dibwan called Khirbet Khudriya. The ruins there proved to be the remains of a Christian monastery, dating from about AD 100 to about AD 600. A square stone pillar had a cross-shaped depression carved in its top. In this depression, a person could sit while being baptized. Some of us enjoyed reminding the several Baptists on the staff that evidently Christians at that early date were baptizing by either pouring or by sprinkling. Beautiful mosaic floors were found in many of the rooms. Crosses were either carved or painted on plaster walls or on artifacts.⁶



Juglet from Tomb F8 (1700-1550 BCE)

G. Herbert Livingston returned with Dr. George Turner in 1968 to join Dr. Calloway at Et-Tell. There were not excavations in 1967, during the Six-Day War when Israel defeated the armies of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. In 1966, Et-Tell fell under Jordanian control, but in 1968 it was under Israeli authority. Livingston was assigned to be the supervisor of the excavations at Site C, which focused on Early Bronze Age city walls, and Site K, which was a corner gate in the wall and a reservoir. The official report notes, “It is an understatement to report that the structure discovered was the most exciting find of the four seasons at ‘Ai, because it seems to be a part of the water system of the EBIII city.”⁷



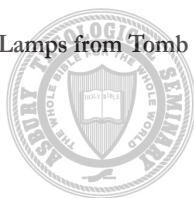


Amphora-type Vessel from Tomb F8 (1700-1550 BCE)

From some of the evidence found in the Early Bronze fortified city of Ai, archaeologists speculate that Egypt may have been the power who controlled the area, and Ai may have actually played a role in Egyptian domination of the area. At this time the city was quite prosperous. The mystery of the lack of a city or occupation during the time of the conquest remains an unsolved problem.⁸



Hellenistic Oil Lamps from Tomb F3 (300-63 BCE)





Herodian/Roman Oil Lamp from Tomb F3 (63 BCE- AD330)

All of the items from Tomb F3 are lamps. Rather common items and poorly made, they are not especially important pieces. Often they were mass-produced in molds. Filled with olive oil and trimmed with wicks, they would have provided a minimal amount of light for households throughout the Middle East. As a collection, they do show the interesting range of decorative motifs used for these everyday household items.





Byzantine Oil Lamps from Tomb F3 (AD330-638)

G. Herbert Livingston was not only an archaeologist; he was a Free Methodist pastor who served churches in Wisconsin, Iowa, Ohio, Kentucky, and New York. From a farming family in Northern Wisconsin, he was determined to get an education in the midst of the Great Depression and hitchhiked 450 miles to Wessington Springs College in South Dakota. While a student at Asbury Theological Seminary from 1945-1948 he worked his way through school partially on helping with construction of the Administration Building and the Bettie Morrison apartment building. He was inspired to pursue Old Testament Studies by his Asbury professor Mrs. Gaile Morris. Livingston would go on to become the first director of the American Institute of Holy Land Studies in 1959, and also work on the sites of Ramat Rahel (known for a palace from the Judaic monarchy) and Tel Qasile (a Philistine port city). He also published the book, *The Pentateuch in its Cultural Environment*.





Byzantine Lamps from Tomb F3 (AD330-638)

The archives of the B.L. Fisher library are open to researchers and works to promote research in the history of Methodism and the Wesleyan-Holiness movement. Images, such as these, provide one vital way to bring history to life. Preservation of such material is often time consuming and costly, but are essential to helping fulfill Asbury Theological Seminary's mission. If you are interested in donating items of historic significance to the archives of the B.L. Fisher Library, or in donating funds to help purchase or process significant collections, please contact the archivist at archives@asburyseminary.edu.

End Notes

¹ All images used courtesy of the Archives of the B.L. Fisher Library of Asbury Theological Seminary who own all copyrights to these digital images. Please contact them directly if interested in obtaining permission to reuse these images.

² Other schools in the consortium included Perkins School of Theology, the Harvard Semitic Museum, the American Schools of Oriental Research, Furman University, Berkeley Divinity School (New Haven), the Lutheran Theological Seminary (Gettysburg), Middle East College (Beirut), and the Nicol Museum of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

³ *Walking Together Through Life: A Livingston Family Memoirs*, G. Herbert Livingston. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2011, p.251.

⁴ Getting Archaeology Right at Ai, Henry B. Smith, Jr. *Answers Magazine*. posted June 16, 2013. Accessed at: <https://answersingenesis.org/archaeology/getting-archaeology-right-at-ai/> on April 7, 2017. In this article it is suggested that Khirbet el-Maqatir might be a better location for the biblical city of Ai.

⁵ “The 1966 ‘Ai (Et-Tell) Excavations,” Joseph A. Callaway. *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, no. 196 (Dec. 1969), p.4.

⁶ *Walking Together Through Life: A Livingston Family Memoirs*, G. Herbert Livingston. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2011, p.255.

⁷ “The 1968-9 ‘Ai (Et-Tell) Excavations,” Joseph A. Callaway. *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, no. 198 (April 1970), p.28.

⁸ “Ai,” from *The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. One, Revised edition. Merrill C. Tenney, ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009, p.106-107.

