

The name might be preserved by a village a mile or two away, while the hill eventually received some nondescript name such as "hill of beans." Most of these names begin with the word "tell" which is modern Arabic for hill or mound. Hence, archaeologists use the term to designate an artificial hill which contains ruins of an ancient city. There are hundreds of these tells in Palestine, and their shape is so distinctive that often it is easy to recognize them even from quite a distance.<sup>6</sup>

This discovery solved the problem of places with ancient names but without early ruins. It gave the clue to the location of many an ancient site which otherwise might have remained undiscovered. It provided the archaeologist with the great privilege of beginning his excavation, in many cases, in ruins antedating New Testament times, without having to dig carefully and laboriously through later material. It provided important places for research where it was unnecessary to disturb modern houses in order to dig (though sometimes there is a Moslem shrine on the top of the tell, making inaccessible the very place where the city records would be most apt to be found). Finally, it showed that in many places a relative chronology could be easily established, since the later cities would naturally be above the earlier ones.

The second great discovery which Petrie made was the importance of pottery for dating. For many years other scholars questioned the value of this discovery, but now opposition to it has about disappeared. Petrie pointed out that pottery, or earthenware dishes, gave a remarkable criterion for fixing chronology. After the invention of pottery in prehistoric times, it was used wherever people lived. Once clay is baked into pottery, it is virtually indestructible. Even if broken into small pieces it is immediately recognizable as distinct from any natural material. Inevitably most dishes

<sup>6</sup>See picture of the tell of ancient Beth-shan on Fig. 22.

are broken in time. Once broken, the pottery would be very difficult to repair satisfactorily, while the cost of replacing it was not great. So wherever people have lived in Palestine, pieces of pottery are quite certain to be found.

There are many ways in which pottery could vary from time to time. These include its general shape, the shape of the handle, the shape of the rim, the type of firing, the color of the dish, the type of decoration, the color of decoration, etc.<sup>7</sup> There are so many possibilities of variation that styles constantly changed, sometimes gradually, sometimes suddenly (in the latter case the coming of a new ethnic group is usually indicated).

As soon as a few mounds had been excavated and the pottery of the various strata arranged in sequence, it was possible to take bits of pottery from the side of an unexcavated mound and to make a judgment as to its equivalence with those from a particular level of an excavated mound. Specialists in Palestinian pottery have acquired sufficient skill to date many sherds within half a century and thus to know when a site was occupied, simply from examining the pottery strewn on its side or washed out by the rain. It is hard to overestimate the great importance of this discovery for the increase of our knowledge of the history of ancient Palestine.

From the excavation of Palestinian sites have come many discoveries of great importance to Bible students. Some of these will be mentioned later on.

Since the problems of excavation in Syria are quite similar to those of Palestine, Syria can be included under this head. However, a somewhat larger amount of inscriptional material has been found in the region north of Palestine. An outstanding discovery has been a large collection of tablets found at Ras Shamra in northern Syria

<sup>7</sup>See picture of samples of prehistoric pottery from a Mesopotamian site on Fig. 23.