

ARCHAEOLOGY

Huge Palace in Palestine

Uncover huge structure in Jericho that may have been built by Roman ruler, Herod, or his son. Dried up tomato plants in soil over ancient walls aided discovery.

See Front Cover

► THE LARGEST ancient palace yet known in Palestine has been discovered and excavated this year at Jericho, not far from the north in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

The work has been done by the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem, under the direction of Prof. James B. Pritchard, of Crozer Theological Seminary, Chester, Pa.

The excavation was done in a former tomato patch which later was restored to its original condition by agreement with the Arab landlord. Announcement of the discovery was made at Yale University where the ASOR has its headquarters.

The palace was a large rectangular structure about the size of a football field, measuring 284 by 152 feet, and contained 36 rooms built around a colonnaded open court. The building was constructed of cut sandstone, which was plastered over and then painted with brilliant colors.

The front cover of this week's SCIENCE NEWS LETTER shows a general view of the excavations at the site.

In the tropical climate of the Dead Sea, approximately one-quarter mile below sea level, the ruling class of Jerusalem during the Roman period found refuge from the damp, cold winters of the capital. The palace enjoyed an imposing view of the north shore of the Dead Sea, and at the same time was sheltered from the winter winds by the near-by hills to the west.

This area, which blossoms all winter and produces bananas, oranges, grapefruit and dates, is supplied with abundant water from springs in the surrounding mountains. It is still the resort of royalty. Just across the Jordan River, the present ruler of Hashemite Jordan, King Abdullah, has his winter residence at Shuneh.

The palace discovered this past winter dates from the time of Christ and may have been built by Herod the Great (37 B.C.—4 B.C.) or by his son Archelaus, who ruled after him for ten years. Many coins belonging to both of these rulers were found. According to the historian, Josephus, Herod built a palace in Jericho and there murdered his brother-in-law Aristobalus. In the same history there is an account of the burning of the palace upon Herod's death and of its being elaborately rebuilt by his son Archelaus. Evidence for burning and reconstruction was found in the excavation.

The building was not only imposing in

size; it was luxurious. There were elaborate baths—both hot and cold—and mosaic floors of artistic design. Wine jars which had been imported from the islands of the Mediterranean, and a large hoard of more than 120 jugs for holding perfumed ointment were found in the palace area.

The mild winter climate of Jericho, much like an English summer, made it possible to live out of doors much of the time. The rooms were arranged around open courts. One small court had in it 20 pedestals of well-cut stone, probably for the purpose of supporting stone jars containing flowers.

When the building fell into disuse much of the good stone was looted for building purposes elsewhere and for the repair of the old Roman road which runs from Jerusalem down to Jericho. Some of the finest pieces of cornice work found this season were pulled out from under this ancient road, which is mentioned in con-

nection with the story of the Good Samaritan in the Bible.

The site had been extensively occupied at about 3000 B.C., but had been abandoned for centuries until the Romans cut their foundations through the debris left by the earlier inhabitants. It was again occupied by the Arabs during the Eighth Century. During the Roman times, the palace was well supplied with fresh water brought down from the mountain in a concrete conduit. Parts of this ancient canal are still used by the Arabs who live in Jericho today.

The Roman palace was nowhere visible when work began this year. However, the excavators were able to trace some of the lines of the palace walls by the drying up of tomato plants growing in the thin soil immediately over the ancient walls. This observation led to the excavation and to the subsequent discovery of the palace immediately below a winter crop of tomatoes.

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● RADIO

Saturday, May 12, 1951, 3:15-3:30 p. m., EDT

"Adventures in Science," with Watson Davis, director of Science Service, over Columbia Broadcasting System.

Award ceremony of the Second National Science Fair from the Exhibit Hall, Washington University, St. Louis, Mo. Winning exhibitors will be interviewed and prizes awarded.



COLUMN BASES—These are the bases of columns or pedestals lining the small court in the ancient Roman palace discovered in Jericho.