

CENTRE D'ARCHÉOLOGIE MÉDITERRANÉENNE
DE L'ACADÉMIE POLONAISE DES SCIENCES

ÉTUDES et TRAVAUX

XX

2005

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*Terracotta figurines
from et-Tell, Bethsaida*

In the years 1956–1957 Polish archaeological teams under the directorship of professor Kazimierz Michałowski conducted excavations at the shores of Black Sea. It was an important step taken towards the engagement in study of material remains left after antique cultures. Excavations were conducted jointly, by the National Museum in Warsaw and The State Hermitage Museum, then in Leningrad. The object of the study was Mirmekeion, a Greek colony lying in the Bosporan Kingdom. Excavations documented that Mirmekeion was founded in 6th century B.C., it survived the period of prosperity during the Hellenistic period and decayed later to become a fishing village.

In the years 1998–2000 the official Polish mission within the framework of an international consortium conducted archaeological investigations within the borders of the State of Israel. The object of this research was et-Tell, identified with Biblical Bethsaida, an artificial hill situated at the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, some three kilometers away from its actual coastline. Previous excavations on et-Tell documented a multilevel and multicultural settlement.¹

Literary sources, both Biblical and extrabiblical indicate, that at the beginning of our era Bethsaida was a fishing village which had risen to the status of a *polis* by the tetrarch Philip Herod, son of Herod the Great. There exists an indication, that the area was settled with a larger group of newcomers, although, we do not know who they were. The changing of the status of Bethsaida apparently took place around 30 A.D.

Tetrarch Philip (4 B.C. – 34 A.D.) inherited from his father a large area encompassing the north-eastern portion of his father's kingdom, and in particular Trachonitis, Auranitis, Batanea and Gaulanitis. In the thirty fourth year of his reign (30/31 A.D.) Philip issued a series of coins which distinguished itself by legend and denomination. There are semis, quadrans and half-quadrans, all supplied with the legend "KTIC" (the founder).² The emission of this series should with good reasons to be connected with the change of the status and renaming with the imperial name Julias of the fishermen's village of Bethsaida.

¹ Bethsaida. A City by the North Shore of the Sea of Galilee I, 1995, eds. R. ARAV, R.A. FREUND [= Bethsaida I]; Bethsaida. A City by the North Shore of the Sea of Galilee II, eds R. ARAV, R.A. FREUND, 1999 [= Bethsaida II]. Articles: R. ARAV, Et-Tell and el-Araj, in: *IEJ* 38, 1988, pp. 187–188; Id., Et-Tell and el-Araj, in: *IEJ* 39, 1989, pp. 99–100; Id., Bethsaida 1989, in: *IEJ* 41, 1991, pp. 184–186; Id., Et-Tell (Bethsaida) 1989, in: *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 9, 2, 1989–1990, pp. 98–99; Id., Bethsaida 1992, in: *IEJ* 42, 1992, pp. 252–254. Additionally, monographs and articles on separate subjects have been published, such as: M. BERNETT, O. KEEL, Mond, Stier und Kult am Stadttor. Die Stele von Betsaida (et-Tell), in: *Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis* 161, 1998; R. ARAV, A Mameluk Drum from Bethsaida, in: *IEJ* 43, 1993, pp. 241–245; R. ARAV, M. BERNETT, An Egyptian Figurine of Pataekos at Bethsaida, in: *IEJ* 47, 1997, pp. 3–4, 198–213; R. ARAV, M. BERNETT, The Bit Hilani at Bethsaida: Its Place in Aramaean/Neo-Hittite and Israelite Palace Architecture in the Iron Age II, in: *IEJ* 50, 2000, pp. 47–81. Also general and introductory articles: R. ARAV, J.J. ROUSSEAU, Elusive Bethsaida Recovered, in: *The Fourth R* 4 No. 1 (January 1991) pp. 1–4; Id., Bethsaida, Ville Perdue et Retrouvée, in: *Revue Biblique*, 1993, pp. 415–428; R. ARAV, New Testament Archaeology and the Case of Bethsaida, in: *Das Ende der Tage und die Gegenwart des Heils, Festschrift für Heinz-Wolfgang Kuhn zum 65. Geburtstag*, eds M. BECKER, W. FENKE, Leiden-Boston-Köln 1999, pp. 75–99; H.-W. KUHN, Zum neuesten Stand der Grabungen auf et-Tell, in: *Welt und Umwelt der Bibel* 4, 1998, pp. 78–80.

² A. KINDLER, The Coins of the Tetrarch Philip and Bethsaida, in: *Bethsaida II*, pp. 245–249.

About the earlier history of Bethsaida the literary sources are mute, but the archaeological material is abundant.

The Polish mission worked on the eastern portion of the acropolis nicknamed “The Temple Area”.³ Among the objects found on acropolis were terracotta figurines, a group of artefacts found all over the Eastern Mediterranean, and also abundant both at the Black Sea and on Cyprus. Since through several periods trade with figurines or moulds was wide spread, these items constitute a kind of “style *koine*” of the Mediterranean. At some periods, however, the globalization was less prominent, and thus these figurines show a distinct local ethnic trend. From Bethsaida I will introduce examples of both. In the third volume of the excavation reports from Mirmeki, professor Sztetyło presented chosen items and stated that in Mirmeki terracotta figurines were abundant, and all dated within the time space from the 6th cent.B.C. until the two first centuries A.D.⁴ The cases of finding of terracotta figurines were on et-Tell less common, their dating although was similar.

A series of early terracottas showed a distinct Phoenician character and as such were quite similar to the terracotta found on Cyprus. Some of them will be presented in the following.

Of Phoenician character is a fragment presenting the head of a man (Fig. 1). It was found inside the building called “The Temple of the Imperial Cult”. The excavators interpreted it hastily as a representation of an Israelite king, bearing an Ammonite crown, leaning on the description and dated it to the time span between the 9th and 8th centuries B.C.⁵ It appears, however, that a simpler interpretation is more satisfying and this will be proposed below.

The statuette was made of large crystalline clay, reddish in color, containing fairly large basalt grits. The size of the extant piece is as follows: length 60 mm, width 32 mm, and thickness 25 mm. It is solid and was cast in a mould in the front only; the back is flat and plain. The material as well as the matrix seem of local manufacture, although the technology used is well attested in Iron Age Palestine. The iconographical analogies to the art of

³ I. SKUPIŃSKA-LØVSET, Bethsaida, czarujące miasto na północnym brzegu jeziora Genezaret, in: *Z otchłani wieków*, 54, 2, 1999, pp. 45–50; EAD., Pierwszy sezon wykopalisk w Betsaidzie, *Sympozja kazimierskie poświęcone kulturze świata późnego antyku i wczesnego chrześcijaństwa II*, 2002, pp. 225–233; EAD., Utgravninger i Bethsaida., in: *Nicolay* 80.3, 1999, pp. 6–11; EAD., Polskie wykopaliska na północnym brzegu Jeziora Galilejskiego, in: *Łódzkie sprawozdania archeologiczne*, 2001, pp. 443–464; EAD., A New Cultic Building from the Time of Jesus Christ – Excavations at the “Temple Area” in: Bethsaida, in: *Sanctuaries and Cult. Eastern Review* 5, 2001, pp. 255–262; EAD., Wyniki badań polskich na stanowisku et-Tell w latach 1998–1999, in: *Starożytna Palestyna w badaniach polskich*, Łódź 2003, pp. 87–117; EAD., The Results of the Excavations at et-Tell, Roman Bethsaida. The Cult Site at the Gate, in: *The Orient and the Aegean. Papers presented at the Warsaw Symposium, 9th April 1999*, ed. F.M. Stępniewski, Warsaw 2003, pp. 131–142; EAD., Pilgrim Routes on the Northern Shores of the Sea of Galilee – the Location of Bethsaida and Excavations on its Acropolis, in: *Trade Routes and Pilgrimage Trails as a Factor of Integration. Sanctuaries and Cult. Compostela Group of Universities*, eds J. KMIECIŃSKI, M. OLĘDZKI, K.E. NATKAŃSKI, Łódź 2004, pp. 125–140.

⁴ Z. SZTETYŁO, Mirmeki III. Wykopaliska odcinka polskiego w r. 1957, in: *Wykopaliska polsko-radzieckie w Mirmeki*, eds W.F. GAJDUKIEWICZ, K. MICHAŁOWSKI, Warszawa 1976, pp. 101–108.

⁵ R. ARAV, Preliminary Report, 1987–1993, in: *Bethsaida I*, pp. 17–18, Fig. 10.



1. Fragmentary head of a statuette of a type of a man wearing a high egyptianizing crown with a feather on each side.

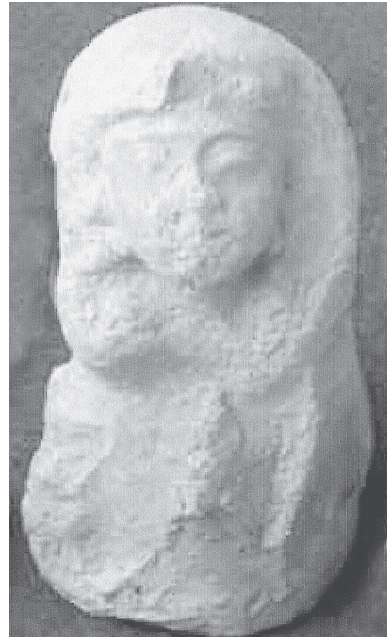
the Phoenician horizon are obvious. Close similarities shows a type of terracotta recorded at the border of the village of Kharayeb situated in the district of Sidon. Here at the precipice sanctuary, a favissa was discovered *c.* 10 m away from the building. It contained rich terracotta material dating from 6th to 1st cent. B.C. Maurice Chehab specified 1119 entries in his catalogue for the clay objects of Kharayeb. The type we are discussing now, is described by him as “Personage à coiffure osirienne”, a type uniting Egyptian and Oriental features and considered typical of the Phoenician culture in the late Iron Age.⁶

Specifically the head similar to the et-Tell item formed a part of a figurine of a type of a seated mature male clasping his long and rich beard with one hand and holding the other along his thigh. On his head was a high crown with a feather at each side. In Kharayeb a type of a man similarly seated and having a similar hairstyle but carrying instead of a high crown; a modius was also recorded. Modius is a headgear typical of the Persian period thus a dating for both variants to the 6th century B.C. is proposed here. On et-Tell

⁶ M. CHEHAB, *Les terres cuites de Kharayeb*, in: *Bull. du Musée de Beyrouth* X, 1951–52 (Texte) and XI, 1953–54 (Planches), Pls. VII 2, 4–6.



2. Fragmentary head of a statuette showing a type of a man with rich hair and beard.



3. Head and shoulder portion of a woman, having a coiffure of rich hair, parted in the middle of the head.

a fragment of a terracotta modius was also found.⁷ Chehab discusses this person as divine or semidivine and searches for connections with Melqart of Tyre.⁸

Another terracotta head belonging to the same context formed a part of the figurine of a type of a bearded man with rich hair combed onto the forehead (Fig. 2). It was solid, hand modelled, measuring in height 74 mm, width 60 mm and thickness 45 mm. It was found far away to the north of the so-called “Temple area” but still on the acropolis.⁹ The fragment has good analogy among the items from Kharayeb and should apparently also be dated to the Persian period.¹⁰

Of the figurines showing women and dated similarly to the above two will be presented. The upper part of the statuette of a young woman made of gritty reddish clay is solid and dipped in wash. It shows similarities to the large group of terracotta statuettes found on the sites belonging to the Phoenician culture horizon.¹¹ (Fig. 3) The front portion

⁷ Bethsaida II, pp. 25, 32, Figs. 16, 21 upper row. This fragment was erroneously interpreted as „Woman wearing a veil over a tiara”. For analogy cf. CHEHAB, *Les terre cuites*, Pl. VIII 2,3,4.

⁸ CHEHAB, *Les terre cuites*, p. 129.

⁹ Bethsaida II, pp. 104–105, Fig. 47, here dated to the 6–5th. centuries B.C.

¹⁰ CHEHAB, *Les terre cuites*, Pl. VIII, 1.

¹¹ I. SKUPIŃSKA-LØVSET, *The Ustinov Collection. Terracottas. Oslo-Bergen-Tromsø 1978* [= Ustinov Collection], Pl. IV UT 14.



4. Head of a woman wearing large ear-adornments and a necklace.

of the figurine is moulded, but in a very general way. Her round face is framed by a voluminous coiffure with the hair parted in the middle and falling in a thick mass on her shoulders. Hands are lacking, but possibly they were held close to her breasts. The entire upper surface bears traces of being covered with a characteristic red wash. A supplement to this head forms another one of a woman with large ear-adornments and a necklace (Fig. 4).¹² Such jewellery is of typically Phoenician character, well documented on the Palestinian coast and on Cyprus. This piece was found North from “The Temple area” in the building interpreted as a “bit hilani palace” (square K 44) and measured 36 x 53 mm. It was also solid and moulded only on the front side.

Last to be presented is comparatively well preserved statuette of the dwarf-god pataekos (Fig. 5).¹³ Similarly to the above described statuette it was found in the “bit hilani palace” on level -167.96 to -168.04 m. This little faience figurine, 61 mm high, shows conventional facial features, which in fact can be recorded both in Palestine and on Cyprus and

¹² Bethsaida II, p. 95, Fig. 39 interpreted as „Goddess with Egyptian Hathor hairstyle”. For analogies cf. CHEHAB, *Les terre cuites*, Pl. I.2; SKUPIŃSKA-LØVSET, *Ustinov Collection*, pp. 35–36, Pl. IV, UT 15.

¹³ Bethsaida II, pp. 91–93, Fig. 37. R. Arav mentions that within the borders of Eretz Israel 184 figurines of this kind have been recorded so far.



5. The pataekos.

appears to be characteristic of the 6th century B.C.¹⁴ The back portion of the statuette is lacking. There exists variants of this type, and some figurines were used as amulets.

Of the Hellenistic period several fragments of figurines may also be recorded. They are moulded, empty in the middle and of standard iconography.¹⁵ Of these much discussed was the head of a woman with the hair covered, which excavators interpreted as a portrait of Livia in the function of priestess of her husband's cult. The item was discovered already in 1989 in square I 52, locus 525, which means within the so-called "Temple of the Imperial Cult".¹⁶ The head had a typically Tanagra character, and shows some similarity to the plenitude of statuettes of dancers and dressed women. The best analogy to it was supplied

¹⁴ SKUPIŃSKA-LØVSET, Ustinov Collection, Pl. IV UT 15, Swedish Cyprus Expedition III, Pls. XLVIII. 17, LXXII, CII. 10, 11 etc.; CHEHAB, *Les terres cuites*, Pl. VII. 1, 3.

¹⁵ Bethsaida II, Fig. 21, p. 33.

¹⁶ For the temples of the Imperial cult and such cults in general within Palestine cf. the habilitation thesis of Monika Bernett at the University of Munich entitled in English translation „The Imperial Cult as Part of the Political History of Judea under the Herods and the Romans (30 B.C.–66 A.B.).”



6. Head of a Tanagra type figurine of a woman swept in a mantle.

by the German archaeologist Dr H.-W. Kuhn in his conference paper on Oct. 25, 2002.¹⁷ The statuette indeed must represent a coated dancer such as the one stored in the “Staatliche Antikensammlungen” in Munich Inv. NI 6790 (and reproduced on a postcard).¹⁸ The Munich item was dated to about 250 B.C. The dating of this type should not be applied rigidly, however neither iconographical nor stylistic indications allow us to apply the Augustan date to the et-Tell figurine.

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¹⁷ H.-W. KUHN, Some Insights and Questions Regarding Bethsaida in the Hellenistic-Early Roman Period, The 4th Annual Batchelder Biblical Archaeology Conference at Uno. I thank Professor Kuhn for kindly supplying me with a copy of his paper.

¹⁸ For the type cf. TÖPPERWEIN, *Terrakotten von Pergamon*, 1976, pp. 184, 194.