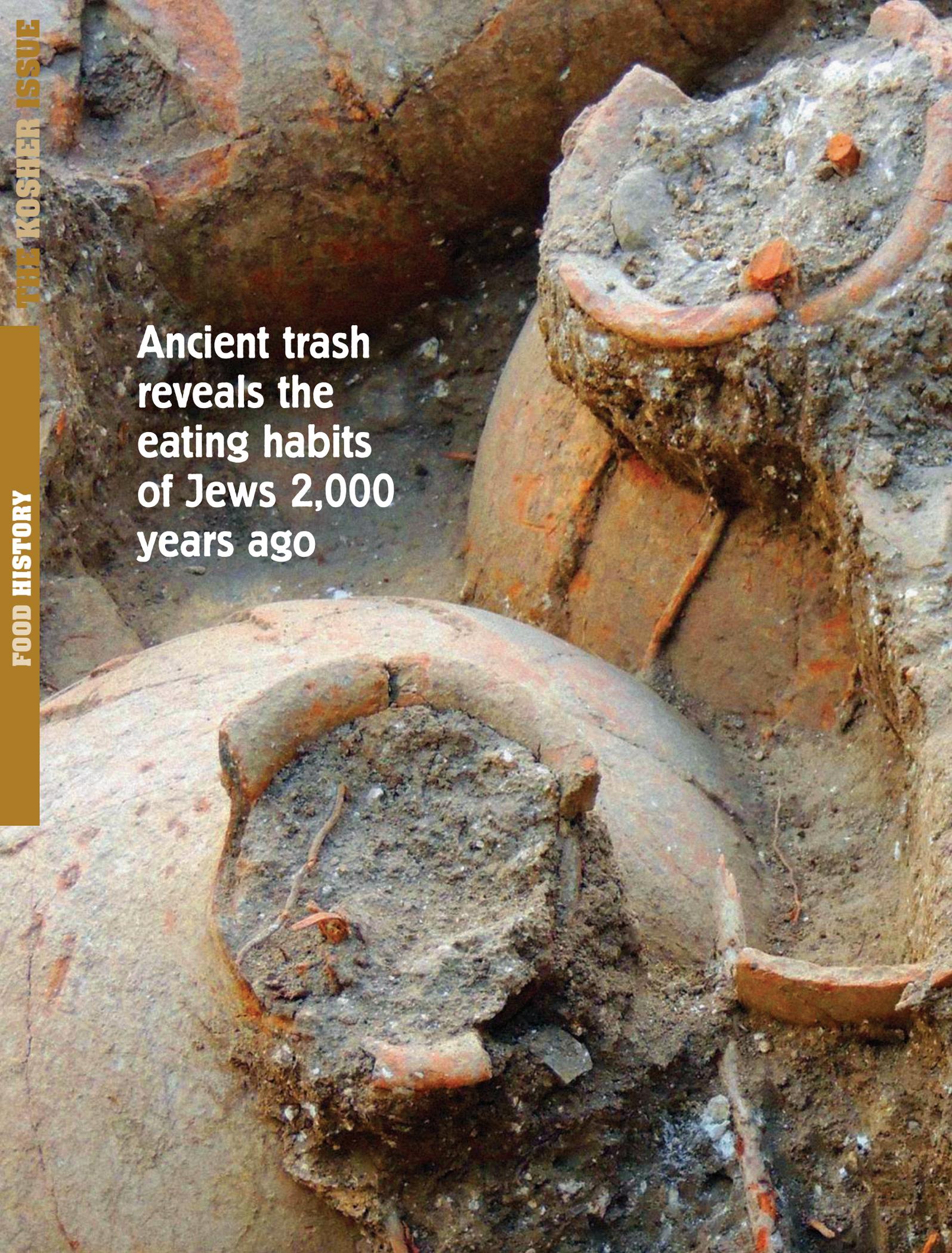
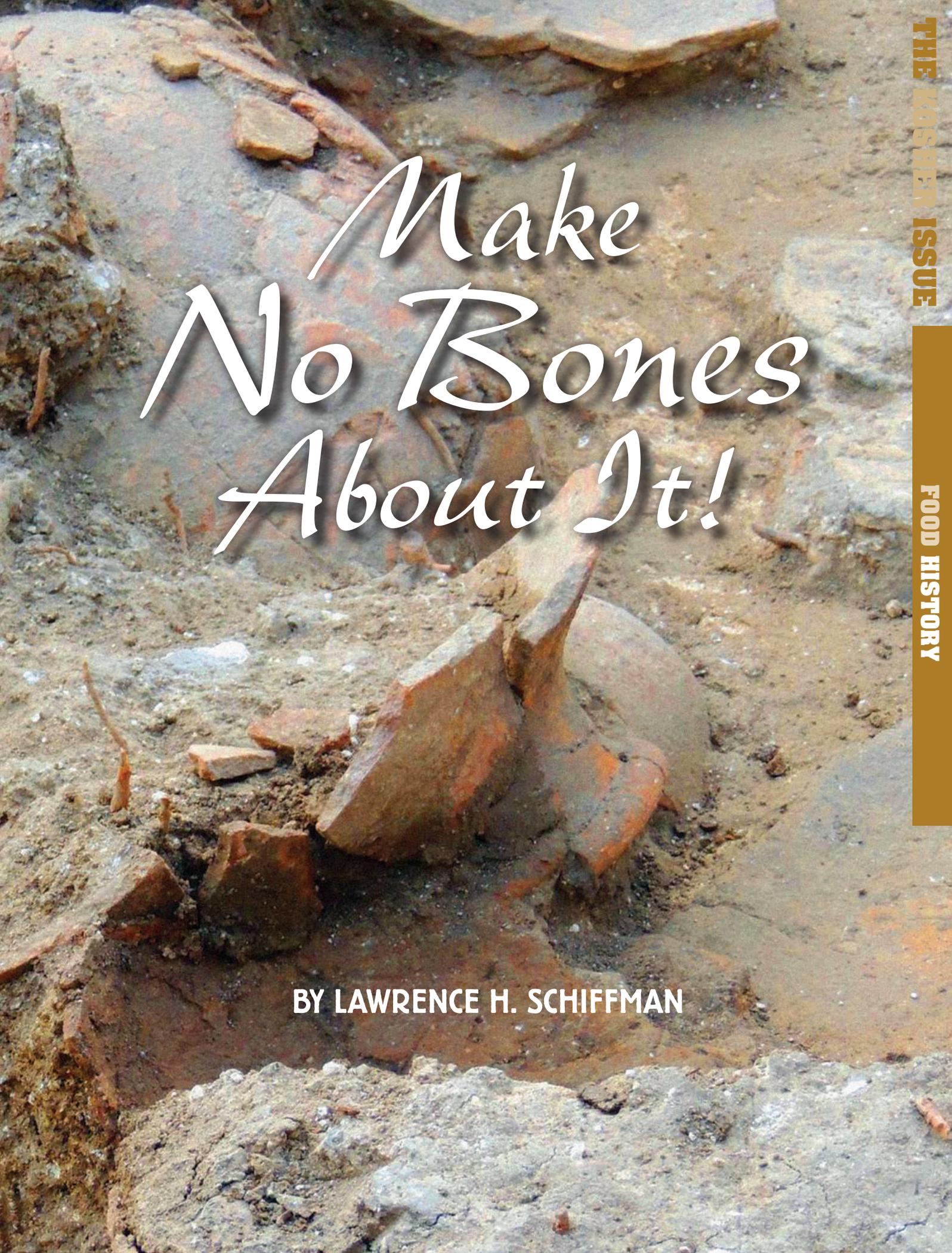


**Ancient trash
reveals the
eating habits
of Jews 2,000
years ago**





*Make
No Bones
About It!*

BY LAWRENCE H. SCHIFFMAN



An excavated section of the City of David, Jerusalem

Sometimes archaeologists discover more or less what we would expect, or so it seemed from a recent news story. It was reported that Tel Aviv University archaeologists, investigating *Bayis Sheini*-period Jerusalem, had discovered evidence that Jews of that era were eating lots of sheep and goats, smaller numbers of chickens and cows, and guess what—no pork. The study was based on an analysis of some 5,700 animal bones excavated in the area of the City of David (officially Area D3, termed the Southern Cut).

The project was part of a general trend to turn towards aspects of daily life in archaeological research. In fact, all over the world archaeologists have been turning to garbage as a source for information about how people lived. In this excavation, the archaeologists, led by Tel Aviv University's Dr. Yuval Gadot, were even able to determine that the animals tended to be older, hence less expensive, and not the best cuts of meat available on the market. They therefore concluded that the garbage had not come from the city's elite but rather from more simple people. Moreover, because pigeon bones were absent, they also determined that pigeons were only eaten as part of the sacrificial ritual.

But it turns out that there was much more to learn from these excavations. I'd actually heard a presentation about this project at a conference at Providence College (about which I reported in this magazine last year) by Helena Roth, a Tel Aviv

University doctoral student, now a visiting scholar at NYU, who is part of the research team. (My thanks to her for advice in preparing this article.) The excavators uncovered a massive landfill used for garbage disposal right outside the walls of Roman period Jerusalem. Generations of archaeologists had been aware of this hill of debris but had shied away from it because of the difficulty of excavating on an incline. Essentially, it was there that the residents of this part of Jerusalem disposed of their garbage up until a little before the outbreak of the Jewish revolt against Rome in 66-73 CE. The date of the garbage was established based on the evidence of coins (over 700 were found in the first season of excavations) and some 11,000 pieces of pottery that were found in the debris.

Garbage disposal was a major problem in cities throughout the ancient world. It seems that this problem was solved in Jerusalem, whether by the Jews or the Romans or both together, by depositing refuse in the Kidron Valley to the east of the city. Throughout this period, layers of soil were deposited over the layers of garbage. The excavators concluded that the garbage was burned before the soil was applied. This proves that we are dealing here with organized garbage disposal, administered by some kind of an ancient department of sanitation. The excavators were able to map the soil-rich layers with the garbage scattered in between. They succeeded in identifying 11 layers in two separate locations, but believe that there were many more that eroded.

We will concentrate here on issues pertaining to food and *kashrus*. Nevertheless, the excavation reports yield an enormous amount of other important information about the lives of Jews in ancient times.

That Jews living in Yerushalayim in the *Bayis Sheini* period did not eat pork came as no surprise. But the report in the popular article to the effect that pigeon bones hadn't been found led me to wonder if we were dealing with animals that had been eaten after *shechitas chullin* (non-sacral slaughter), or if this dump might contain the bones of animals that had been slaughtered as *korbanos*, specifically *kodashim kallim* (sacrifices of lesser sanctity), which were permitted to be eaten anywhere within the walls of Jerusalem. This question led me to a recent issue of the *Journal of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University*, which had published a paper written by a graduate student named Abra Speciarich about her research on the fauna found in this dump.

The scholars who investigated the bones recovered at this excavation came to the conclusion that they mainly derived from animals that had been raised for food purposes. Extremely interesting is the presence of marks on some of the bones showing how the *gid ha-nasheh* (sciatic nerve) was removed (as required by *Bereishis* 32:33). The sheep and goats were slaughtered for the most part at about a year and a half of age, which is when they reach their full weight. Virtually all the cattle had been killed within the first three years of life. Again, this indicates that meat consumption was the purpose of raising these animals. Some things never change, so we are of course not surprised to find out that chicken represented 97% of the fowl in this collection. In general, the parts of the animals found in the dump were from those parts of the animal that are eaten for meat.

The conclusion that these bones were not the result of sacrificial offerings was arrived at by investigating the proportion of hind legs, right and left. This is because the Torah in *Vayikra* 7:27-36 requires that the right hind leg (*shok*) of *shelamim* offerings, which may be eaten anywhere inside the walls of Jerusalem, be given to the *kohanim*. Since the number of right and left leg bones found was even, it was assumed that this was not a dump used for the bones of sacrifices. Again, the absence of pigeons also argued for these bones not having derived from sacrifices.

This is important, because another collection of bones from a garbage dump has been investigated in what is called the Northern Cut (Area L). It was concluded that this dump does indeed represent debris from sacrificial offerings. Studies have shown that the vast majority of the sheep and goats in the Northern Cut derived from animals raised elsewhere in the country. This conclusion accords well with the notion that animals for offerings were brought to the city either by officers in the *Beis Hamikdash* from whom animals for offerings could be purchased, or by

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Food-storage vessels on display

individual worshipers. It was concluded as a result that much of Jerusalem's economy was dependent on pilgrimage to the *Beis Hamikdash*.

Some other major differences between the Northern Cut, which is much closer to the *Beis Hamikdash* itself, and the Southern Cut, which argue for the former representing bones from sacrificial offerings:

First, there is the presence of pigeon bones in large quantity in the Northern Cut. There is considerable archaeological evidence for the raising of pigeons in Yerushalayim, and it is apparent that they were used primarily for offerings, often by those of lower economic status (*Vayikra* 5:7-10). They were not used domestically for food.

Second, the northern debris includes many parts of the animal that are not primarily rich in edible meat. A much greater concentration of meat-bearing parts of the animal is found in the southern landfill, clearly because these are the remains of domestic use. The difference between the two deposits results from the fact that in sacrificial use the entire animal is offered, and must be used in a sanctified manner.

Third, the Northern Cut had more male animals, and indeed, certain *korbanos* may only be male. By contrast, the Southern Cut is generally typical of the garbage that would result from average people living in the city.

We should remember that one cannot distinguish sacrificial offerings from domestically used sheep and goats by age,

because both sacrificial use and regular eating favor slaughter of younger sheep and goats. For all these reasons, it has been concluded that the Northern Cut, in contrast to the Southern Cut excavated recently, seems to contain large amounts of the remains of sacrifices, most of which would have been personally offered *shelamim*.

Since the Southern Cut provides evidence for the non-sacrificial character of the animals whose bones are deposited there, it is interesting that substantial quantities of stone vessels were found there as well. These were used by Jews when the *Beis Hamikdash* stood because stone vessels do not contract ritual impurity, unlike pottery. There is no doubt that the Jews who discarded the broken stone vessels observed these laws scrupulously. Most interestingly, there are even unfinished vessels, indicating that some of those who used this garbage dump were in the business of producing them.

Numerous kinds of fish were also discovered, with two-thirds being saltwater and one-third freshwater. It appears that fish were imported from the Galilee and even from as far as the Nile region. Needless to say, these are all kosher varieties of fish.

We have gone quite a distance from the starting point, the observation that there is no reason to be surprised by the absence of pork in the Holy City during the last 70 or so years of the *Bayis Sheini* period. For some time now, it has been a commonplace assumption that one could distinguish Israel-

SOME THINGS NEVER CHANGE, SO WE ARE OF COURSE NOT SURPRISED TO FIND OUT THAT CHICKEN REPRESENTED 97% OF THE FOWL IN THIS COLLECTION.

ite sites in the *Bayis Rishon* period from those of non-Jews by the absence of pig bones. However, it turns out that the picture is more complex. It is true that sites in Eretz Yehudah show that Israelites did not eat pork. However, it seems that Canaanites did not eat pork either. So it is safe to say that while pig bones would not be found an Israelite site, the absence of them does not prove a site to be Israelite.

While there were some wild boar in ancient Eretz Yisrael (mentioned in *Tehillim* 80:14), it is most likely that domesticated pigs were brought to the country with the Philistine invasion. The Philistines came to the coastline of Israel sometime before the Israelites and apparently imported swine. So we find evidence of pork at Philistine sites from about 900 BCE, and the presence of these animals is assumed to go back a few centuries earlier.

Pork apparently began to be eaten by some of the Northern Israelites in the period leading up to the destruction of the North by Ashur (Assyria). This archaeological discovery is in perfect accord with the Prophet Yeshayahu, who railed against the transgressions of the North Israelites, saying, among other things, that they ate pork (*Yeshayahu* 65:4 and 66:17). That pork was being eaten in some places in Northern Israel close to its destruction should be understood in light of the *Nevi'im* telling us of the overall decline in religious practice and rise of idolatrous worship, usually in the form of syncretism, i.e., combining Jewish worship with the idolatrous cults.

Just as the ancient Israelites of Eretz Yehudah did not eat pork during the period of *Bayis Rishon*, neither did they do so in the period of *Bayis Sheini*. The finding of pig bones in an archaeological context during *Bayis Sheini* times clearly indicates non-Jewish areas of settlement. Further, numerous Greek and Roman sources castigate the Jews for their stubborn adherence to the Torah's prohibition against eating pork. This is mentioned as well by the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher Philo Judaeus and the Jewish historian Josephus. So while we would never have expected to find pig bones in Jewish Jerusalem, it is still rewarding to see Jewish tradition and law in an archaeological context. These excavations are providing new evidence for the strength and continuity of our *mesorah*. ●

Lawrence H. Schiffman is Judge Abraham Lieberman Professor of Hebrew and Judaic Studies and Director of the Global Network for Advanced Research in Jewish Studies at New York University.

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