

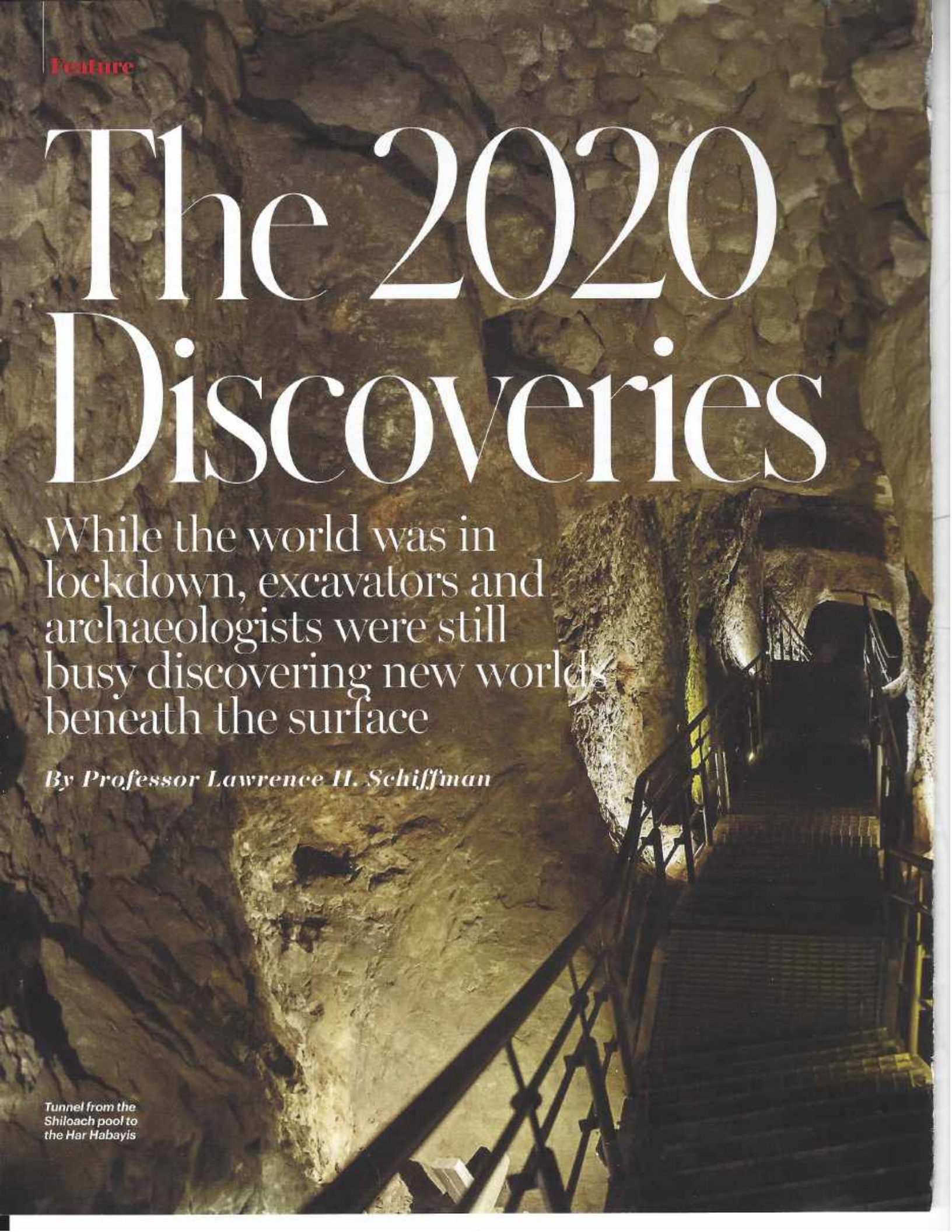
Feature

# The 2020 Discoveries

While the world was in lockdown, excavators and archaeologists were still busy discovering new worlds beneath the surface

*By Professor Lawrence H. Schiffman*

*Tunnel from the Shiloach pool to the Har Habayis*



Partial view of the recently discovered tunnel chambers



## The Chambers Beneath the Kotel Tunnels

Five years ago, I walked with excavator Dr. Avi Solomon through the subterranean system of chambers beneath the lobby of the Western Wall Tunnels, just north of the Kosel Hamaaravi. Finally, this past May 22, on the day that is known as Yom Yerushalayim—the anniversary of the day that the city was unified in 1967—archaeologists announced that explorations of the excavations were set to begin.

The ruins date to the early Roman period, just before the destruction of the Bayis Sheini in 70 CE. They contain a system of rooms—an open courtyard and two rooms on each of three levels, one above the other, connected by staircases carved into the stone. Cooking pots, lamps and other household effects have been found in the rooms. Some have suggested that the complex may have housed a very large *mikvah*, although it is impossible to be certain.

The entire area was hidden by a building that was erected there some 1,400 years

ago during the Byzantine period, when the region was under the rule of the Eastern Roman Empire. The upper structure had collapsed in an earthquake in 1035 CE and was then rebuilt.

In the early Middle Ages, there was a *shul* very close to this newly excavated complex. A letter from the Cairo Genizah tells us about the rebuilding of this *shul* after the same disaster. So while we are not entirely sure what this complex of rooms was used for, it certainly shows us the continuity of Jewish life in Yerushalayim in ancient and medieval times.



The shul under Wilson's Arch

## From Yerushalayim to the Har Habayis: The Origins of Wilson's Arch

When was Wilson's Arch constructed? This arch—what remains of a bridge that used to connect the upper city of Yerushalayim to the *Har Habayis* (the Temple Mount)—is named for the British archaeologist who explored it in the 19th century. In fact, the medieval *shul* mentioned above seems to have occupied part of the remains of this causeway. Scholars have long debated the exact date this arch was built. Sophisticated new means for gathering and analyzing organic remains have allowed for the carbon dating of this structure, providing a secure chronology. It indicates that the bridge had originally been constructed as part of the expansion and refurbishing of the *Har Habayis* and *Beis Hamikdash* by King Herod (Hordos), beginning in 18 BCE. The final stages of its construction date to 30 to 60 CE, when the city was under direct Roman rule. These excavations support Josephus' report that although Herod made major progress in rebuilding the *Beis Hamikdash*, construction was still going on when the revolt against Rome began in 66 CE. Furthermore, the same excavations discovered a small but unfinished Roman theater. Its construction most likely began under the Romans after the *Churban*, and it was probably altered as a result of the Bar Kochba Revolt.



Portion of the excavations at Tzippori

## A Mikvah in Every Home

The last half-century or so have seen the discovery of more and more *mikva'os* from the *Bayis Sheini* and Talmudic periods in Eretz Yisrael. Many of us have visited those at Masada and in the upper city of Yerushalayim, where no doubt their proximity to the *Beis Hamikdash* made it worthwhile for the residents to have their own private facilities. However, large numbers of *mikva'os* have also been found throughout the areas of Yehudah and the Galil. What is especially significant here is that they demonstrate that the laws of ritual purity were observed by many Jews in regard to their everyday eating, and not just by *kohanim* for the *korbanos*—as can be seen in the Mishnah and Gemara. Even after the *Churban*, when much of the population shifted northward into the Galil, the Jews continued to observe these laws, even beyond the use of the *mikvah* for family purity.

## Stoneware Was the Vessel of Choice

Scholars have known for some time that the presence of stone vessels at sites occupied by Jews in ancient Eretz Yisrael is due to the fact that according to *halachah* such vessels aren't susceptible to impurity. However, a recent thorough study of excavated chalkstone vessels found at Tzippori (Sepphoris) has shown that they remained in use throughout the second century CE. Tzippori is a town that played a leading role in the history of the Jewish people; it was the home of Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi, who edited the Mishnah c. 200 CE. Indeed, the Mishnah assumes that many Jews observed these purity laws with regard to the food they ate each day. The large number of chalkstone vessels found in this city, which has been the subject of numerous archaeological excavations, indicates that the observance of these laws continued after the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash*.



A stone mikvah in an ancient private residence



## Turn your design passion into a lucrative career

LEARN:

- Qualities of Light, Color, and Texture
- Design Styles
- Drafting and Rendering
- Functionality and Aesthetics
- Code Compliance
- Presentation Skills

JOIN OUR

### INTERIOR DESIGN CLASS

in Monsey & Brooklyn

Separate classes for Men & Women | 12 month program, Evenings & Weekends

Registration closes Sep. 17

flexible payment options

Over 85% Job Placement Success

with a number of graduates opening their own design firms.

Create your own projects with the skills you learn

Instructors are Licensed & Professional Interior Designers



The Institute for Career Advancement

Your Path to Success

For more information call

718.506.0912

info@icainstitute.com



Roman-era pottery

## The Busy Pottery Industry of Yerushalayim

Recently, the results of an excavation on the grounds of the Crown Plaza Hotel, opposite the Central Bus Station in Yerushalayim, were announced. Archaeologists found an extensive complex of pottery workshops that operated from the period of the *Chashmona'im* (after 150 BCE) up until the destruction of the *Bayis Sheini* in 70 CE. Before the revolt of 66 to 73 CE, the site had been operated by Jews making traditional types of pottery out of clay mixed according to a local recipe, but the excavation indicated that the situation changed immediately after the revolt. The Tenth Roman Legion, known as the *Fra-tensis*, occupied the site and operated it, using Jewish potters who continued to

work there. This legion was prominent in defeating the Jews and destroying the *Beis Hamikdash*, as well as conquering Masada, and it remained in Yerushalayim for years afterward, being involved in putting down the Bar Kochba Revolt.

This site contains one of the largest pottery workshops of the ancient Eastern Mediterranean region, and the only one known to have been operated by Roman legions. This workshop was apparently taken over by the Romans after the revolt and began to produce Roman-style vessels, using a different clay recipe that added quartz. They also produced building materials, including roof tiles, some of which bore the emblem of the Tenth Legion. That the workers and apparently some customers were Jews is evident from the presence of *mikva'os* and stone vessels, as well as the absence of pig bones.



Excavated wine press complex



Aerial view of the excavations in progress at Tel Beit Shemesh

## The Road to Beit Shemesh

Tel Beit Shemesh, a seven-acre site located near the modern city of Beit Shemesh, was a large and flourishing city between the period of the Assyrian destruction of Northern Israel and the destruction of the *Bayis Rishon*. As usual in Israel, in order to preserve this site, a planned road had to be rerouted. But after the road was redirected, the new site turned out to be the location of a *Bayis Sheini*-period village that had a *shul*! It is assumed that this village was abandoned during the Bar Kochba Revolt. In the same area, numerous underground shelters, which were dug for use during that revolt, were discovered. Since the road could not be rerouted a second time, a decision was made to dismantle and rebuild the *shul*, brick by brick, in another location.



## How Was Wine Produced During the Bayis Rishon Era?

**D**own in the Jezreel Valley (Eimek Yizrael), excavations uncovered an entire complex used for the production of wine during the *Bayis Rishon* period. Archaeologists discovered a treading floor cut into the rock that was used to crush the grapes, and several vats into which the grape juice flowed after pressing. The main vat was plastered to avoid leakage. Another area may have been used to hold the grape pulp and skins, from which sugar could then be extracted. After the juice flowed into the main vat, it would have been removed and poured into clay jars to complete the fermentation process. Numerous pits were probably used for the underground storage of the "bottled" wine. It has been estimated that this site dates to the ninth century BCE and later, when there was an increase in the demand for wine in Assyria (Ashur). We are all familiar with the story of the vineyard of Navos, whose death was engineered by Achav, the king of Northern Israel, on the instigation of his wife, Izevel. The excavated winery gives us some sense of how grapes grown in such vineyards were processed into wine in the days of *Tanach*. Interestingly, wine continued to be produced at this site until sometime in the first century CE, and it may even have been used later on by medieval vintners.



Dead Sea Scroll fragment

## New Meaning for the Term "Invisible Ink"

**N**ew technology is leading to new discoveries—including a way to read scrolls that we previously thought were blank! Scholars are benefiting tremendously from the new forms of multispectral digital imaging being used by the Israel Antiquities Authority, making it possible to read previously illegible text. Scientific analysis has also been used to identify forgeries among fragments that surfaced on the antiquities market after 2002. New computer algorithms seek to place small fragments of parchment in the immense jigsaw puzzle of some 20,000 fragments that are part of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

From May 17 to 20, we at New York University held a conference with the

# IT'S WORTH IT.

## SUNPOWER®

by Kamtech Solar

DEMAND BETTER SOLAR

Fast & hassle-free installation, it couldn't be simpler.



Heshy Drew  
follow me on LinkedIn

Looking forward to serving you!

347.670.4369

Heshy@kamtechsolar.com

Sign up for \$0 down

DON'T WAIT  
many rebates are ending soon

## ARCHEO-TERRORISTS AND JUST PLAIN THIEVES

Friends of the Israel Antiquities Authority entitled “The Dead Sea Scrolls in Recent Scholarship,” where we learned how science and technology are impacting our study of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Chemical analysis of the residue in inkwells is beginning to yield new information about the content of the ink used for the scrolls.

A small number of fragments thought to be blank were in Manchester, England, where they had been sent by Jordanian authorities in the 1950s to enable study of the writing material. Recently, using very sophisticated photographic techniques, it was determined that these fragments actually bear writing.

An announcement also came from the IAA about an ongoing study of the DNA of the writing material of the scrolls. All of the material that was studied turned out to have come from sheep, which was apparently the main writing material for the scrolls. We already knew this from conventional scholarship, but DNA analysis of the parchment is at its very earliest stage and is likely to make important contributions.

With new tools, archaeologists are constructing a much better understanding of daily life in the past. They’re benefiting from advancement in the sciences, such as what we have seen with carbon-14 dating, DNA analysis, and a variety of methods for analyzing animal and plant remains. This is combined with new approaches to the study of the ancient environment, as well as a better understanding of the complexities of the ancient economy.

I remember visiting Shomron in 1974 (it isn’t safe to go there now!) and being offered antiquities by Arab kids. From its inception, Israel has faced an ongoing battle to keep its antiquities from being stolen, often even before they are excavated. All over the country there are sites where, despite the best efforts of the Israel Antiquities Authority, thieves have been able to rob easily saleable antiquities that later entered the market as unprovenanced (lacking evidence of the rightful owner or the context in which they were found). The motivation for this kind of activity is usually profit, although occasionally there are episodes where Arabs destroy sites in order to reuse their stones in modern construction.

But aside from the profit motive, there is now a new form of destruction being wrought by what we might call archeo-terrorists. These destroyers have been striking on the *Har Habayis* and in Judea, Samaria and Gaza. Their goal is to destroy archaeological evidence of Jewish life in order to erase the Jewish connection to the land. It is this same form of violence against treasures of the past that characterizes groups such as the Taliban and ISIS. Some of these destroyed sites, it should be noted, were actually the remains of Jewish communities in Iraq and Syria.

Of course, the destruction of Jewish antiquities in Israel doesn’t work because more and more artifacts continue to be discovered through scientific archaeological investigation, or sometimes purely by accident. Nonetheless, the campaign

of destruction goes on.

Years ago, I had a personal experience of this. A number of us were on our way with an Antiquities Department inspector to visit the upper end of Nachal Chever, where a rare silver coin had been found in a cave. We drove through Kiryat Arba and then eastward toward the cave. At some point in the middle of nowhere, our truck stopped and the inspector got out. He had spotted some Arab antiquities thieves despoiling an ancient cemetery. With the Arabs apparently hiding behind a nearby wall, we gathered the spoils they had dug up from ancient Canaanite graves. One of our group noted that the water bottles lying next to the baskets of antiquities were still cold, indicating that the robbers weren’t far away. After visiting the cave that had been used as a refuge during the Bar Kochba Revolt, we returned to Yerushalayim with the recovered antiquities.

The Israel Antiquities Authority has an investigative unit that seeks to recover stolen antiquities, as does the Civil Administration of Judea and Samaria. These units have recovered an enormous amount of material; the Antiquities Department of the Civil Administration now has a collection of some 40,000 such items. In fact, just before the coronavirus struck, an exhibit opened at the Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem with more than a hundred items. (Full disclosure: I am a member of the Board of the American Friends of the Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem.) All the items in this exhibit were confiscated from looters.

Let’s hope for an end to both kinds of destruction—looting antiquities for profit and destruction of the past as a confused political or religious act. Above all, don’t buy any of these things; it encourages the looters to destroy more sites. ●

● *Lawrence H. Schiffman is the 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.*