Jericho (Palestine) - Archaeology of the Ancient City

The Archaeology of the Ancient City of Jericho
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Jericho (also called Tell es-Sultan) is the name of a tell situated on an ancient lakebed plain in what is known as the West Bank, Palestine. The oval tell has between 8 and 12 meters of occupation fill, and it covers an area of about 2.5 hectares. The city that the tell represents is one of oldest continuously occupied (more or less) locations on the planet.

The most widely known occupation at Jericho is, of course, the Judeo-Christian Bronze Age one—Jericho is mentioned in both old and new testaments of the bible.
However, the oldest occupations at Jericho in fact much earlier than that, dating to the Natufian period (ca. 10,500-9,300 years before the present), and it has a substantial Pre-Pottery Neolithic (8300-7300 BC) occupation as well.

Jericho’s reputation in the bible has a strong association with towers and walls— and with good reason. The first walls in Jericho were built during the Pre-Pottery Neolithic A (PPNA) period, indicating that violence and conflict were important parts of Jericho's history for a very long time. Another important feature of Jericho is plastered skulls, human skulls on which faces have been modeled in plaster and then buried beneath floor houses. Plastered skulls are a known trait from PPNB sites, such as Kfar HaHoresh, Beidha, Çatalhöyük and Beisamoun, and similar eerie statuary at 'Ain Ghazal.

**JERICHO CHRONOLOGY**

**Natifian** (10,800-8,500 BC), sedentary hunter-gatherers in large semi-subterranean oval stone structures

**Pre-Pottery Neolithic A** (8,500-7300 BC), roofed, oval semi-subterranean dwellings in a village, engaging in long distance trade and growing domesticated crops, construction of the first tower (4 meters tall), and a defensive perimeter wall

**Pre-Pottery Neolithic B** (7300-6000 BC), rectangular houses with red- and white-painted floors, with caches of plastered human skulls
Early Neolithic (6000-5000 BC) Jericho was mostly abandoned during this time

Middle/Late Neolithic (5000-3100 BC), very minimal occupation

Early / Middle Bronze Age (3100-1800 BC) (extensive defensive walls constructed, rectangular towers 15-20 meters long and 6-8 meters tall and extensive cemeteries

Late Bronze Age (1800-1400 BC), Jericho destroyed

After the Late Bronze Age, Jericho was no longer much of a center, but continued to be occupied on a small scale, and ruled by Babylonians, Persian Empire, Roman Empire, Byzantine and Ottoman Empire, on and on until the present day

**JERICHO AND ARCHAEOLOGY**

Jericho was recognized as the biblical site a very long time ago indeed, with comments from the "Pilgrim of Bordeaux" in AD 333.
Among the archaeologists who have worked at Jericho are Carl Watzinger, Ernst Sellin, Kathleen Kenyon and John Garstang.

**SOURCES**

This glossary entry is a part of the About.com Guides to the Pre-Pottery Neolithic, and Biblical Archaeology, as well as part of the Dictionary of Archaeology.


