

Early Places Without Metals:

Jericho

Advanced

I have included Jericho here because we all have learned (and mostly successfully forgotten) that "Jericho" stands, first, for the oldest known inhabited human settlement unearthed by archeologists, going back to the neolithic. As far as we were exposed to Christian or Jewish religion, we also were induced to associate, second, Jericho with something important that is described in the Bible (Old Testament) or Torah, same thing.

The two items, it turns out, were closely intertwined and for some they still are. The Bible / Torah relates that Joshua, Moses' spy, sidekick, and finally successor, brought down the walls of Jericho by having his priest blow their ram's horns (shofar) around ca. 1400 BC. That remarkable feat of acoustic engineering opened the way to a divinely ordained and painstakingly executed and recorded major genocide¹. Since ancient Jericho was known to have turned into the mound of Tell-es-Sultan, scores of archeologists started digging for the remains of the famous wall toppled by acoustics plus divine interference. To make a long story short: Joshua's wall has never been found, but plenty of other exciting stuff (plus walls from far earlier times).

It is also not true that people lived in Jericho without a break. There were long periods where no traces of human occupations were found, even so the town had not been destroyed at the beginning of such a phase.

A G. Warren dug a first few holes in 1873 but serious digging took place between 1907 - 1909, 1930 - 1936 and, the latest one done by Kathleen Kenyon, in 1952 - 1958. We might safely assume that in these early days not all findings could be properly recognized and that some religious or anti-religious bias in interpreting the finds was almost unavoidable.

It was Kathleen Kenyon who inspired by her findings came up with the "**Pre-Pottery Neolithic (PPN)**" nomenclature, subdivided into PPNA, PPNB and so on. While everybody uses the system, details seem to a bit blurry, however. Nevertheless, here is the German Wikipedia scale:

Name	BC Date
Epipaleolithic	12 000 - 9 000
Aceramic neolithic	9 500 - 6 400
PPNA	9 500 - 8 800
PPNB	8 800 - 7 000
PPNC	7 000 - 6 400
Ceramic neolithic	6 400 - 5 800
Transition Chalcolithic	5 800 - 4 500
Chalcolithic	4 500 - 3 600
?	?
Early Bronze	3 000 - 2000
Time line periods from 12 000 BC to 2 000 BC	

Note that this table is slightly different to a similar table given [elsewhere](#) - and most likely to any other corresponding table. Archaeology is not an exact science (and thus less boring).

Jericho, it turned out, goes back to the PPNA times. The people living then are called the "Sultanians". Even before that, the [Natufians](#) used the Jericho spring as a good place for hunting camps. The amazing part is that a rather massive "city wall" with an extremely massive tower was built already in 8 050 BC - and it's not clear what for. The tower, for example, is *inside* the walls - not a smart thing to do for fighting off attackers that are outside. The city then had an estimated 3 000 inhabitants (or far less; it's contested), a rather large number at this the time. There was no use of metals, however. There was also no sizeable occupation in these periods: some time before 7 000 BC , 5 500 BC - 4 500 BC, 4 000 BC - 3 300 BC.

The tower is an impressive structure for its age - and nobody knows why those old pre-potters did that massive amount of work. Interpretations of it's use include: fortification (there were just no enemies around), an anti-flooding system, a ritual centre, a political symbol of communal power and territorial claim, or an astronomical beacon that connected mankind to the cosmos and announced the summer solstice by a particular shading.



Tower of Jericho. Note humans on top and bottom.

Source: Kenyon and Holland (ed.) "Excavation at Jericho", London: British School of Archaeology at Jerusalem.1981 Vol. 3/2, pl. 9.

- Old Jericho is also quite famous for all the "decorated skulls" discovered under the floors of PPNB people's houses. The first ones were discovered on the last day of Kathleen Kenyon's dig and caused quite a sensation. Some "artist" had taken the skull from the (dead and decayed, we hope) body, made the underside flat so it could be stood up, and decorated it by plastering it over, doing some painting or adding nice shells for eyes.
- Meanwhile it turned out that doing a bit of skull-art was a general custom in the Levante (and [Anatolia](#)). You do your own interpretation. Here are some pictures:



Skulls of Jericho (or Levante)

A few more pictures [here](#).

Source: All over the Internet

- This quaint custom was revived by the catholic church some 8000 or so years later. The decorated skulls of some loved ones are now displayed in churches:



Skulls of ?

Source: Photographed in the Festung Marienberg Church, Würzburg, Germany

● Somewhere in Russia around the 3rd to 4th century AD, decorated skulls were also fashionable:



Skulls with funeral masks, Siberia (?)

Source: Photographed 2015 in the Eremitage, St. Petersburg

▀ All things considered, old Jericho did have its special features (like the tower and the wall) but has also a lot in common with all the other towns around by then.

1) There is not the slightest doubt that in **Joshua** 6:17 - 25 the Bible / Torah describes a **genocide** in all aspects of the technical meaning of that word. To quote:
"And the city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the LORD for destruction. ... Then they devoted all in the city to destruction, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys, with the edge of the sword. ... And they burned the city with fire, and everything in it".
 That's not remarkable. The Bible/Torah is full of genocides or just plain old mass murders in the name of the LORD, and it is always described as a positive deed.
 Remarkable is that the Israeli psychologist George Tamarin in 1973 related the Book of Joshua's account of the **Battle of Jericho** to more than 1,000 Israeli schoolchildren, aged between 8 and 14. He then asked the children a simple moral question: Do you think Joshua and the Israelites acted rightly or not? They had to choose between A (total approval) B (partial approval) and C (total disapproval). The results were polarized: 66% gave total approval, and 26% total disapproval, with rather fewer, 8%, in the middle with partial approval. Some of the disapproval was not to the killing itself but to the defiling of the "pure" by associating (via killing) with the impure. The basic reasoning for justifying mass murder was essentially that Joshua and his army "just followed orders", not to mention that the people just needed that land. Sounds familiar to Germans.