



The oasis of Ein Gedi.

to the agricultural area of Ein Gedi, as well as other oases to the east of the Dead Sea: the parcels of land in the oases were always transmitted with their water rights, and the deeds noted the day of the week that the transmitted parcels of land would be irrigated by the aqueducts and the duration of the irrigation. It may be presumed that

parcels of land without water rights lacked any economic value since they could not be used for agricultural cultivation. In contrast to other villages in the country, the built-up area of Ein Gedi did not expand at the expense of cultivable land—the amount of water determined the extent of what could be irrigated. The amount of water that flowed from the springs at Ein Gedi was not sufficient to irrigate the entire plain area between Nahal Arugot and Nahal David. Nevertheless, the inhabitants did not treat their oasis with disrespect; they always carried out dense construction, one house abutting the next. This arrangement also made defense of the village against desert marauders easier. Every location that was excavated at the Ein Gedi site uncovered the remains of buildings.

Ein Gedi at the End of the Second Temple Period

Josephus, in his book *The Jewish War* (III, 54), notes that Ein Gedi was a district capital (*toparchy*). This information indicates that towards the end of the Second Temple period Ein Gedi was of considerable economic importance. At the time, its economy was based on the balsam plant that was cultivated in the oasis and the production of unguents derived from it. During the Second Temple period, the cultivation of a “dry” variety of dates was known to be

Balanites aegyptiaca (Egyptian balsam), a small tree native to North Africa, growing in abundance around the Dead Sea and from which balsam was produced.

