

CANAANITE APHEK

Its Acropolis and Inscriptions

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EXCAVATION OF APHEK-ANTIPATRIS

Since 1972 a two-months excavation season has been carried out each summer at Tel Aphek (Tell Ras el-'Ain) by the springs of the Yarkon River about ten miles due east of Tel Aviv. The history of a site rich in historical events is unfolding before the eyes of the archaeologists who, accumulatively, have spent more than one full year at the site. The excavations are directed by the writer on behalf of the Tel Aviv University Institute of Archaeology, with the participation of various American Institutions (1978 season: Allegheny College, Cornell University and Rice University).

The earliest level so far uncovered at Tel Aphek dates to the early third millennium B.C., i.e. Early Bronze Age Ic. A city wall 2.80 meters wide surrounded this early town, one of the first walled cities of this age. The city, flourishing through most of the Early Bronze Age, was deserted—like most of the towns of the Land of Israel—sometime during the last centuries of the third millennium B.C. The second flourish of Aphek was

at the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age (MBIIa) during the reign of the Egyptian Twelfth Dynasty. A royal palace, two superimposed fortification systems, a rich intramural cemetery and six stratigraphic levels define this period. Aphek (and its ruler, Prince Ya'nakilu) is one of the cities mentioned in the Egyptian Execration texts of this period. Aphek of the Late Bronze Age, Canaanite Aphek of Joshua 12:18, is mentioned again in Egyptian documents of the New Kingdom. It is to this city, confined to the northern part of the mound, that we dedicate these lines.

But first let us continue our brief historical-archaeological sketch of Aphek-Antipatris. Aphek is mentioned twice again in the Old Testament, in both cases as a base from which the Philistines went forth to wage battle with the Israelites (I Samuel 4:1; 29:1). Philistine strata were found at Aphek, and a typical village from the period of the Israelite settlement was found and excavated vis-à-vis Aphek on the lowest terrace of the Samarian hills at a site known today as 'Izbet Şarṭa. This small village was founded during the 13th century B.C. and destroyed about 1050 B.C., probably in consequence of the famous Battle of Ebenezer when the Israelites were defeated by the Philistines. A unique find from this settlement is an inscribed sherd bearing more than eighty letters in the Proto-Canaanite script, one of its lines being the earliest abecedary ever found in a linear script. This find is of great importance for the history of the Semitic alphabet and the transmission of that alphabet to the Greeks.

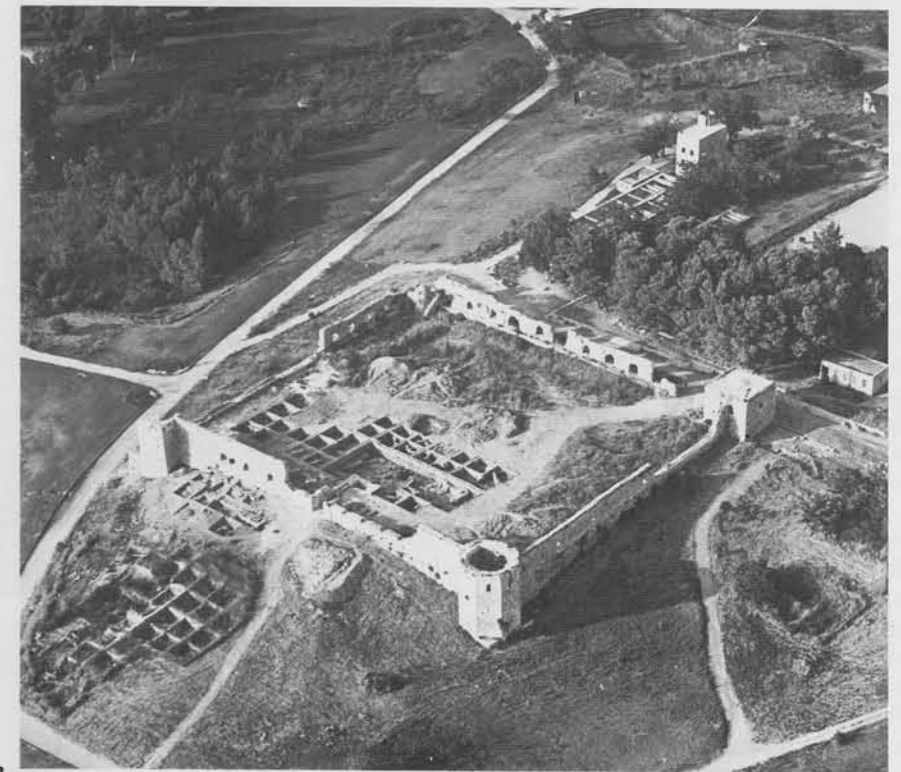
During the Israelite Monarchy, Aphek was known as a city within the borders of the Northern Kingdom. In the Hellenistic period its name was Hellenized to Pegai ("the springs"). In the year 9 B.C. a town was built on the site by King Herod who called it Antipatris, in memory of his father. The Herodian town with its stone-paved main street, its mosaic-floored patrician houses and its substantial public buildings, was destroyed and subsequently abandoned after the earthquake of A.D. 419.

But this important site—near the affluent

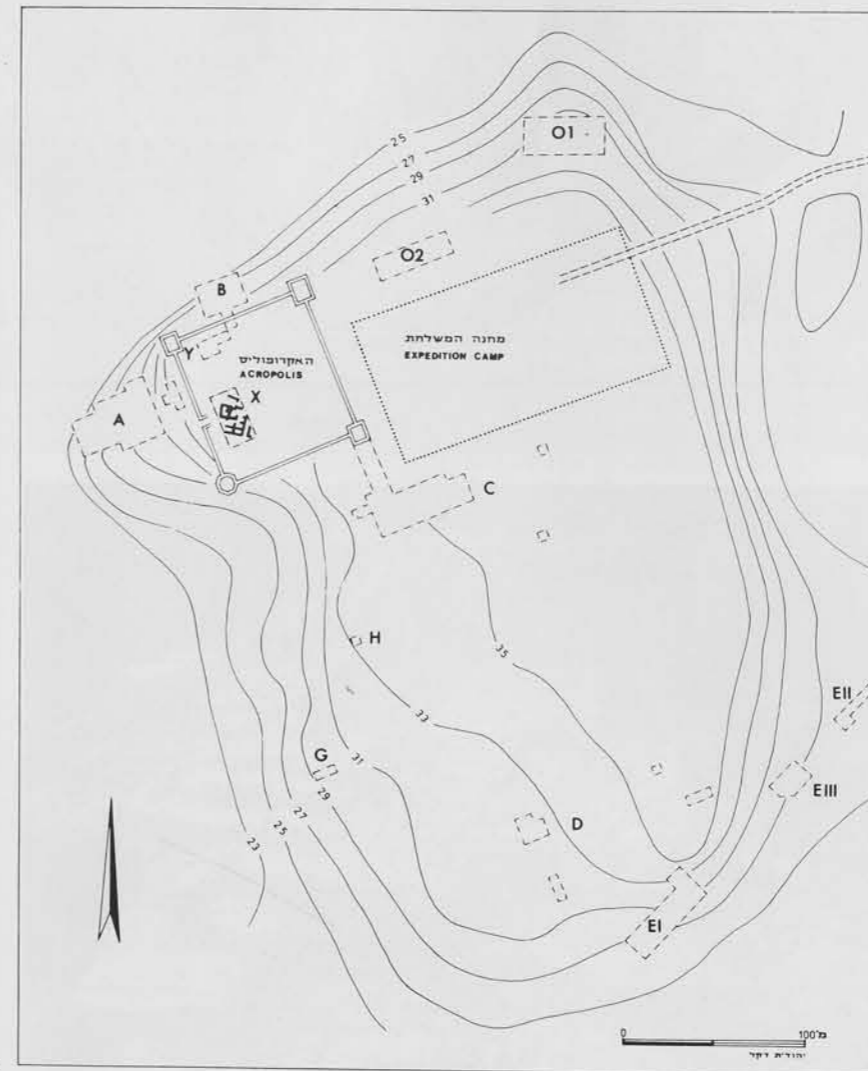
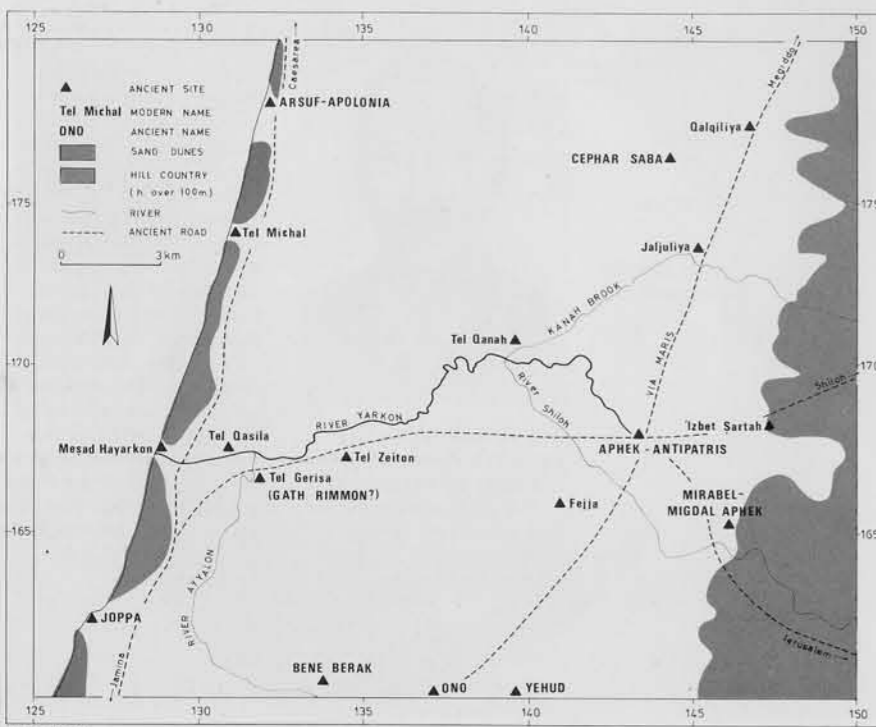
of the Yarkon springs and strategically located to guard the narrow pass by the foothills—was never really deserted: castles, forts and caravanserais succeeded each other on the ancient mound, the last one, "Pinar Bashi," a Turkish fort built by the Sultan Selim I in 1571, still crowning the crest of the tel.

THE ACROPOLIS OF CANAANITE APHEK

Since 1974 the remains of Canaanite Aphek are being unearthed underneath the courtyard of the Turkish fort. The discovery



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of remains of the Late Bronze (Canaanite) Age at Aphek has resolved a major problem concerning the identification of the site which was raised by the German scholar, Martin Noth, and others in the wake of the salvage excavations of the 1930's. Since Aphek is mentioned in the Bible as a Canaanite town, located between Ono and Lydda to the south and Socho (Kh. Shuweikeh near Tulkarem) to the north, both A. Alt and W. F. Albright naturally proposed identifying Aphek with the most prominent tel between Ono and Socho, namely Tell Ras el-'Ain—Tel Aphek of today. But when no remains of the Late Bronze Age showed up in the early excavations, Noth rejected the identification, suggesting in its stead Tel Qanah (Tell Mukhamar), a smaller mound some 4 km. to the west. Thus, the discovery of a Late Bronze Age stratum at Aphek put an end to the controversy.

During the excavation seasons of 1974-1977 the major efforts of the Aphek-Antipatris expedition were directed toward the acropolis of the Canaanite city. To date, three public buildings, similarly oriented, their walls parallel to each other, have been unearthed. Two of these, at the eastern and northern ends of the excavated area, have been only partially excavated and their exact nature must await further investigations. It is the third public building, occupying the southwestern part of the excavated area—which is now completely uncovered, thus lending itself to interpretation—that serves as the main topic of this article.

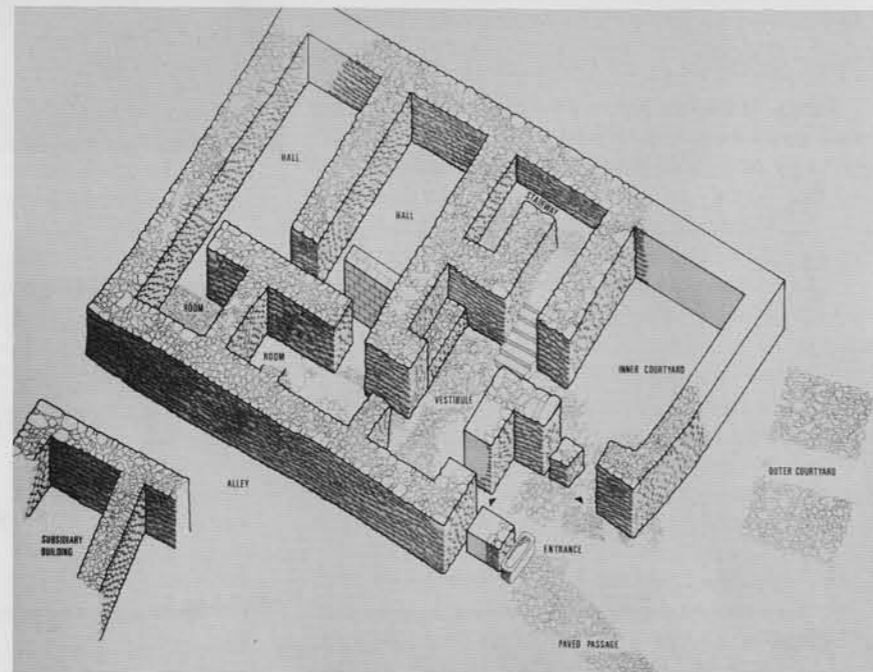
THE GOVERNMENT HOUSE

The building, roughly square, occupies an area of 400 square meters. The exceptional width of its walls (1.40 m.) the central position of its staircase and the nature and depth of its destruction debris suggest a multistoried building. A four meter wide alley separates the building from another of the same nature at its east. An open, stone-paved courtyard stretches to its north for about 12 meters, where still another public building once stood. The areas west and south of the government building have hardly been investigated, except for an open area at least 5 meters wide at the south, where hundreds of grape seeds were found lying on the floor.

The entrance to the government building is at its northeastern corner. A paved passage leads to this entrance, where a 1.5 meter long monolithic watering trough was found. From this point one could have entered the building through a large (13 x 8 m.) inner courtyard, and then proceeded to the stairway leading to the upper, and probably main storey. This entrance perhaps served the upper classes, residents of the building, noblemen seeking an audience with the governor or the like. The commoners, having different reasons for seeking entrance, and presumably unmounted, had no need for the inner courtyard and no direct approach to the main stairway. For these people there was another entryway leading to an inner vestibule where they could continue into what seems to have been either the main floor or the basement of the building, where there were two large halls and two paved rooms. After passing through a guardroom these common folk could eventually have been admitted to the stairway and upper storeys.

The acropolis of Aphek was destroyed in a wholesale conflagration sometime during the second half of the 13th century B.C. The extent of this destruction is vividly attested in the government house, where some of the walls were found standing two meters high, while the fallen debris, stones, charred wooden beams and partially-baked mud bricks filled the space between the extant stone walls of the basement. It seems that the ruins of this government house were never restored—nor even levelled off—prior to the 16th century, when the plastered floors of the courtyard of the Turkish fort sealed the debris.

Many artefacts were recovered from the thick layer of debris covering the ruins of the government building and adjacent courtyards and buildings of the acropolis. Most abundant, as usual, were pottery vessels—some found on the floors and benches where they had lain at the moment of the final catastrophe, others restored by our excavation team from sherds collected from



the burnt layers, the fragments of a single vessel having been recovered sometimes from more than two meters difference of level, evidently having cascaded down from the upper floors when the building collapsed. Large collared-rim pithoi, Cypriote milk-bowls and Mycenaean stirrup-vases, as well as many other local and imported vessels, are all characteristic of the latter part of the 13th century B.C., the last decades of the Late Bronze Age, the Biblical Canaanite period.

Here and there, imbedded in the orange-to-dark-red bricks fallen from the upper storeys, tiny fragments of coloured plaster were distinguished by the excavators. Multi-coloured frescos, of which only miniature fragments survived, are testimony to the high standard of living that the occupants of the government house at Aphek enjoyed. No less dramatic were the bronze arrowheads found with their tips penetrating the southern façade of the building or stuck into the surface of the alley between the government house and the eastern building. These are most probably relics of the final struggle when the acropolis of Aphek was overrun and utterly destroyed.

However, the most exciting finds from Aphek are, unquestionably, the inscriptions. Inscribed material from the Late Bronze Age is so rare in our archaeological excavations (no more than fifty inscriptions of this age have been found during ninety years of excavations in Israel!) that the first inscribed clay tablet found created a sensation. Now that, year by year, more inscriptions of diverse nature, script, and language have been found by our excavation, Aphek is well known not only to archaeologists but also to scholars of other disciplines in the field of Ancient Near Eastern history and philology. Five fragments of cuneiform clay tablets were found in the passageway leading from the inner courtyard of the government house to its stairwell. In the alley another fragment of a cuneiform tablet, a faience ring with Egyptian hieroglyphic inscription and a fragment of a bulla with a Hittite hieroglyphic inscription were found. All eight inscriptions were imbedded in the destruction debris of the building, probably having fallen from its upper storey. Another inscription, a faience tablet bearing Egyptian hieroglyphs, was found near an Iron Age stone-lined silo dug through the rubble of the "government building." Although this inscription, like the others, belongs to the Late Bronze Age, it is the only one that was not found in situ.

THE INSCRIPTIONS

The inscriptional material from the acropolis of Aphek has been studied by: R. Giveon (Egyptian); R. Kutcher (Akkadian literary texts); A. F. Rainey (Akkadian admin-



istrative and lexical texts) and I. Singer (Hittite), all faculty members of the Department of Archaeology and Near Eastern Cultures of Tel Aviv University. The interpretation of the inscriptions presented here is a summary of their published (or as yet unpublished) analyses.

1. An Administrative Text

Fragment of a clay tablet, about 4.5 cm. long, with the beginnings of four lines written in cuneiform Akkadian:

- 1 thousand
- 5/6 hundred
- 2 hundred
- 5 thousand

The fragment is part of a routine administrative document recording considerable quantities of some commodity. Prof. Rainey suggests cattle, wool, grain or precious metal.

2. A Bilingual Lexical Text

The largest fragment found so far, it measures 5.8 x 5.4 cm. The beginnings of



4 General view of the Government Building

5 Isometric plan of the Government Building

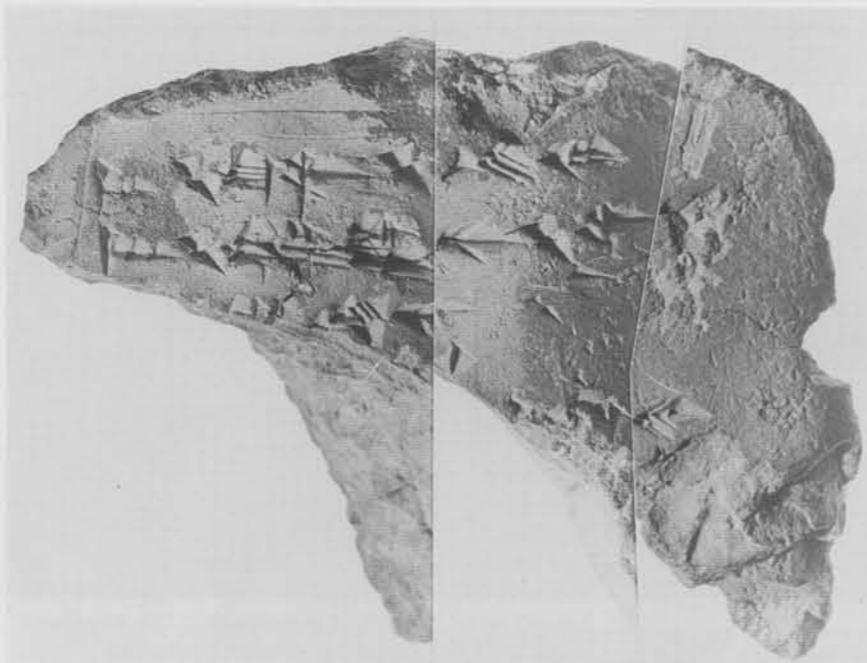
6 The stairway

7 Arrowheads found stuck in walls and floors

8 Mycenaean stirrup-vase found in the conflagration level. H. 13 cm.



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9 An administrative text
10 Bilingual lexicon
11 An Egyptian ring
12 Trilingual lexicon
13 Literary text (verse)
14 Hittite bulla



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Credits
Figs. 2 and 12 are from photographs by Avraham Hay; 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, by Moshe Weinberg.

12 lines in cuneiform script are preserved. The lines are divided into two columns by the cuneiform symbol of two wedges inscribed one above the other following the first word in each line. This is the same sign used by the El Amarna scribes to denote a Canaanite translation of the preceding Akkadian word (*Glossenkeil*). The first column has Sumerian words whilst the only complete legible word of the second column (line 11: *alpu* = ox) may be interpreted either as an Akkadian or Western Semitic word. Prof. Rainey concludes that this fragment is part of a lexical text of the type common in the Ancient Near East. Many, but not all, of the items concern agriculture. No analogy to this lexicon has been found; but it hints at the evolution of an independent school of scribes in Canaan during the 14th/13th centuries B.C.

3. A Trilingual Lexicon

This cuneiform document is a fragment of a clay prism, 5.9 cm. high. Five broken lines have been preserved. The *Glossenkeil* divides these lines into three columns: Sumerian, Akkadian and Canaanite (!) Trilingual lexicons are known from other cultural centers in the Near East, Ugarit for example, but the Aphek trilingual lexicon is the first and only one discovered so far that has Canaanite as its third language. Like the other lexicon discussed above, it has no parallel in the vast literature of the Ancient Near East, and its presence at Aphek is further evidence for the theory expressed above, i.e. that these fragments testify to the existence of a school of Canaanite scribes.

4. A Literary Text

This is the only tablet from Aphek on which remains of the inscription are preserved on both sides, five lines on the obverse and eight on the reverse. Unfortunately, only the endings of the lines were preserved, which makes reconstruction very difficult. Dr. Kutcher is convinced, however, that this is a fragment of a literary bilingual text, the lines written alternately in Sumerian and Akkadian, a common practice in texts of this kind.

5. A Hittite Bulla

As mentioned above, this is the first and only Hittite bulla found in Israel. It is stamped on a lump of clay, partly baked by the fire which consumed the acropolis. Its original diameter was about 40 mm., but more than half of the bulla was broken off in antiquity. The bulla has three decorated concentric circles, characteristic mainly of royal Hittite seals and bullae. Mr. Singer interprets the hieroglyphs in the center ring as the symbols for "prince" or "princess." Of the name of the owner of the seal there remains—apart from his title—only the beginning: "A(r)"

6. An Egyptian Ring

Nearly complete, 25 mm. in diameter, this faience ring was used to stamp and seal official documents. The Egyptian hieroglyphic inscription is translated by Prof. Giveon as: "Amon-Ra abundant in all glory, blessing and kindness." Although this formula does not have an exact parallel, it fits well into the period of the New Kingdom of Egypt, when religious formulae dedicated to Amon are common.

7. An Egyptian Foundation Deposit

This tiny faience tablet (40 x 25 mm.) (not yet published, since it was found only in 1977) is inscribed with Egyptian hieroglyphs on both faces, two columns on each side. Prof. Giveon deciphered two cartouches bearing two of the names of Pharaoh Rameses II and a dedicatory inscription to the goddess Isis. Thus the little tablet is nothing else but a foundation deposit of the type found in quantity in Egyptian temples, but the first and only one to turn up in Israel. As stated above, this tablet, although not found *in situ*, is to be dated to the same general period as the other inscribed material, namely the 13th century B.C.

This little tablet raises further questions: Temples to Isis are not known in Egypt prior to the Classical period (only in one case, during the reign of Rameses II, is a temple to Isis ever mentioned). Is it possible that Rameses built a temple to Isis at Aphek? If not, how did the foundation deposit arrive there? There is no answer to these questions at the present stage of our excavations.

CONCLUSION

During the initial phase of excavations of the Late Bronze Age acropolis of Aphek, Akkadian, Sumerian, Canaanite, Hittite and Egyptian documents have been unearthed, most of them coming from a tall, fortified public building which we have called the "government house." The acropolis of Aphek was totally destroyed by the end of the thirteenth century B.C., and the documents should therefore be dated to this, or the preceding, century.

The existence of such a diverse complex of inscriptions, many of them unique in Israel, points to the importance of Canaanite Aphek as a city situated on one of the main crossroads of the Ancient Near East, the meeting point of its cultures and languages.

The cuneiform texts hint at the existence of a local school of scribes at Aphek—a school of which, up to now, there were only some vague references in the Amarna letters; now we begin to see its handbooks, study-aids and dictionaries.

Bibliography

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Moshe Kochavi is Associate Professor of Archaeology and chairman of the Institute of Archaeology at Tel Aviv University. He received his Ph.D. degree from the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, the subject of his dissertation being "The Settlement of the Negev in the Middle Bronze Age." Since 1972 he has been director of the Aphek-Antipatris excavations. Dr. Kochavi is a member of the board of directors of the Israel Exploration Society, the Society for the Archaeological Survey of Israel, and the Israel Archaeological Committee.