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 2.00 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 flourishment of Aphek was at the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age (MBIIa) during the reign of the Egyptian Twelfth Dynasty. A royal palace, two super-imposed fortification systems, a rich intramural cemetery and six stratigraphic levels define this period. Aphek (and its ruler, Prince Yarkadian) is one of the cities mentioned in the Egyptian excavation texts of this period. Aphek of the Late Bronze Age, Canaanite Aphek of (Joshua 12:21), 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 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 (Judges 4:1: 29:1). Philistine straits 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 Samaritan hills at a site known today as Labet Ya'afa. This small village was founded during the 13th century B.C. and destroyed about 1090 B.C., probably in consequence of the famous Battle of Ebenzer 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 Bashir," 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 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. Shweikh 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 Tell Qunah (Tell Mikkaram), 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 expeditions 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 burned layers, the fragments of a single vessel having been recovered sometimes from more than two meters of sterile earth, evidently having cascaded down from the upper floors when the building collapsed. Large collapsed rings, abundance of loam, and fragments of bowls and Mycenaean stirrup-vases, as well as many other local and imported vessels, are all characteristic of the upper 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. Multicoloured fragments, of which the miniature fragments survived, are testimony to the high standard of living that the occupants of the government house 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 Aphik was overthrown and utterly destroyed.

However, the most exciting finds from Aphik are, unquestionably, the inscriptions.

The inscriptions

The inscriptions from the acropolis of Aphik have been studied by: R. Gissin (Egyptian), R. Kameski (Akkadian literate texts), A. P. Rainey (Akkadian administration 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 beginning of four lines written in cuneiform Akkadian:

1. thousand
2. 5/9 hundred
2. 2 hundred
5. thousand

This 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 Text

The largest fragment found so far, it measures 5.6 x 5.4 cm. The beginnings of...
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. The same sign used by the El Amarna scribes to denote Canaanite language of the preceding Akkadian word (Glassenkell). The first column has Sumerian words whilst the only complete legible word of the second column line 11: almu-2-08 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 before, 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 tablet of 20.8 cm. in length. Five broken lines have been preserved. The Glassenkell divides these lines into three columns: Sumerian, Akkadian and Canaanite. The Trilingual lexicon is known from other cultural centers in the Near East. For example, the Aphaq trilingual lexicon is the first and only one discovered so far that has Canaanite as its third language. Like the Aphaq lexicon, this document has a parallel in the vast literature of the Ancient Near East, and its presence at Aphaq is further evidence of 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 Aphaq 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. Katcher 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 Bulle
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., more than half of the bulla was broken off in antiquity. The bulla has three decorative concentric circles, characteristic mainly of royal Hittite seals and bullae. Mr. Singer interprets the hieroglyphics 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: "Ar[......]

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

7. An Egyptian Foundation Deposit
This tiny faience tablet (40x25 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. Givon deciphered two cartouches bearing two of the names of Pharaoh Ramses 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 Ramses II, is a temple to Isis ever mentioned). Is it possible that Ramses built a temple to Isis at Aphaq? 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 Aphaq, 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 Aphaq was totally destroyed by the end of the thirteenth century B.C., and the documents should therefore be dated to this or the preceding centuries.

The existence of such a diverse complex of inscriptions, many of them unique in Israel, points to the importance of Canaanite Aphaq 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 Aphaq—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.

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