

NEWSLETTER

The Institute of ARCHAEOLOGY Siegfried H. Horn Museum



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INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY
HORN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
MUSEUM
NEWSLETTER

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Höflmayer Lecture

Tel Lachish (Arabic: Tell ed-Duwier) is one of the most important archaeological sites in the Levant. It is mentioned 24 times in the Hebrew Bible and stood as a buffer in the Shephelah between the coastal plain 35 km (22 mi) to the west, and Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, 40 km (25 mi) to the northeast. Its steep-sloped sides and fortified gate made it seem almost impenetrable, but it was attacked and destroyed at least two times during the Iron Age. Sennacherib, King of Assyria, destroyed Lachish in 701 BC, carrying off most of its inhabitants. This attack was famously depicted as reliefs on the walls of his “palace without rival” at Nineveh, now housed in the British Museum. Eventually, the city was reoccupied until it was destroyed again by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC. During the Persian period, Babylonian refugees occupied the site once again until the entire site was abandoned following the conquest of Alexander the Great. Over the past century, Lachish has been excavated several times, including Starkey (1932-1938); Aharoni (1966-1968), Ussishkin 1973-1994), Garfinkel and Hasel (2013-2017) and Ganor (2016).

Dr. Felix Höflmayer presented a lecture entitled The Austrian Expedition to Tel Lachish 2017-2023 on November 6, 2023, at the Siegfried H. Horn Archaeological Museum Lectureship Series. Dr. Höflmayer and his colleague Katharina Streit direct the Tel Lachish project for the Austrian Archaeological Institute. This non-teaching institute is a part of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. The Austrian Archaeological Institute sponsors several projects in Egypt and other sites, with its largest ongoing excavation at biblical Ephesus in modern Turkey, which began in 1895.

Although there is much evidence for the site’s Iron Age occupation and its connection to historical events, Höflmayer and Streit were drawn to Tel Lachish for other reasons. After examining old photos and comparing them to modern drone photography, they noticed that the site has

(cont'd on p. 2)



Felix Höflmayer.

changed radically since it was first excavated in the 1930s by James L. Starkey, Lankester Harding and Olga Tufnell. The once barren landscape (ca. 1930) has been transformed into productive orchards and farmland, making some of this ancient landscape's features nearly invisible. Even the tell itself has been reshaped by years of excavation, where park trails, old sift piles, and debris hide some of the historical features of the site. Indeed, a ramp created in the 1930s to move excavated soil away from the site now resembles an ancient fortification or tower. Höflmayer and Streit wanted to match the original photographs of the site with modern images to better evaluate the changes that have taken place over time, map the original features of the tell, and help direct future conservation and excavation.

Höflmayer and Streit were particularly interested in connecting Tel Lachish with Egypt during the Middle and Late Bronze Age, using radiocarbon dating. Research questions included: Was the Middle Bronze Age destruction at the site in any way connected to Egyptian activity in the region? Did the Egyptians take advantage of the weakened Middle Bronze Age culture to regain control of northern Egypt? Is there any evidence of Egyptian activity during the early 18th Dynasty? Could an absolute chronological framework be established to provide a historical synthesis of the Middle/Late Bronze Age transition and its relationship with Egypt? To address these and other questions, the team opened two fields: Area S on the western edge of the tell, and Area P on the north side of the Iron Age palace, both previously excavated by David Ussishkin.

Area S was chosen because it had been partially excavated and because Late Bronze Age remains had already been found there in a previous excavation. They found two important inscriptions and two scarabs which could be dated through the radiocarbon samples collected during the excavation. The first inscription is an early-alphabetic ostraca written on a Cypriot White Slip II sherd, dating to the mid-15th BC. It contains at least two



Tel Lachish.

words, including *'abed* "servant" and *nefet* "honey." The second inscription was written in hieratic, an Egyptian cursive script, also on a pottery sherd that had broken into three pieces. It dates from the late 15th or early 14th BC during the early 18th Dynasty. Some of the letters on the ostraca are unclear, but it appears to be a list of Canaanite names with allocated provisions and a few Egyptian names. Another Ostraca written in hieratic with Egyptian names dating to the Ramesside period was also found in Area S.

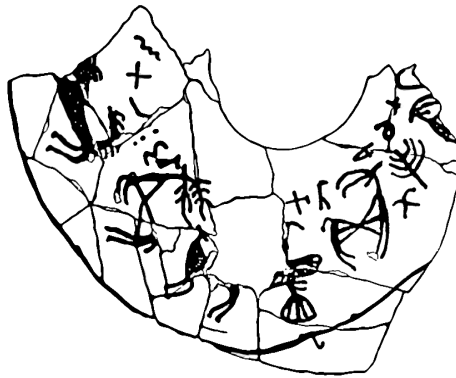
According to Höflmayer, "There is no other excavated site in the southern Levant that has produced as many alphabetic inscriptions as Tel Lachish," especially during the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages. One of the most famous of these inscriptions is on the Lachish Ewer, found in a rubbish pit outside of the Fosse Temple III, by Starkey in 1934, dated to the 13th century BC. Another one, is on an ivory comb that was found at the site, by students from Southern Adventist University, on the recent excavations directed by Garfinkel and Hasel. On the comb is the longest example of a Canaanite sentence ever found.

Although the work in Area P did not produce any inscriptions, the team did find further evidence of a Middle Bronze Age palace previously discovered by

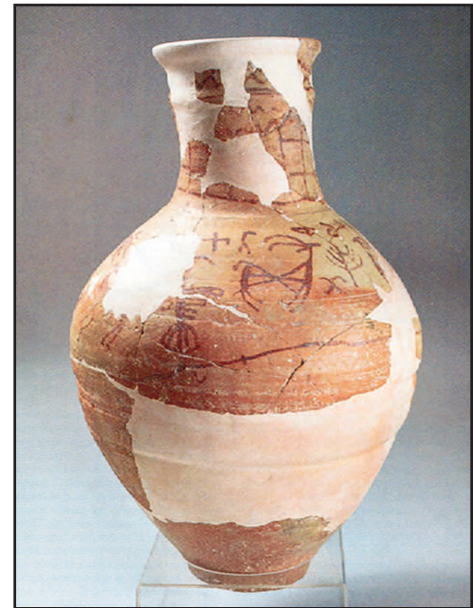
Ussishkin. Additional rooms on the eastern side of the building were discovered, including two plastered mud brick walls and a drain, as well as an even earlier Middle Bronze Age structure below. The palace appears to have been abandoned, leaving only a few fragments of Egyptian stone vessels and a Tell el-Yahudiya ware sherd. Cypriot ceramic imports, including a Black Lustrous Wheel-made juglet were found. A peculiar oblong-shaped Iron Age structure of stacked stones transected by a mudbrick wall was found cutting through the Middle Bronze Age building. The team dug down approximately 4.0 m through the debris but could not reach the bottom or determine its purpose. Höflmayer believes it might be "a large public granary of some kind or possibly the entrance to a water system" like those found at Hazor and Beer Sheva. On the north and southeastern side of Area P, Franziska Rainer conducted a Geophysical survey of the flat terraces on the tell. The results indicated where walls, pits, and burned material might be found in future excavations.

By the end of the season, Höflmayer and Streit determined that the Middle Bronze Age palace was destroyed at least twice during the 16th century BC. It extended farther east than expected and was built over an earlier, even larger

structure, possibly another palace. Some corrections had to be made to the Late Bronze Age chronology based on the radiocarbon analysis, pushing the date for the alphabetic and hieratic inscriptions back by ca. 100 years. The rich assemblage from the Late Bronze Age building suggests that Lachish was a center of early writing by at least 1450 BC and the inscriptions were either written by Egyptian scribes or those trained in Egyptian schools. The two distinct writing systems (alphabetic and Hieratic) are unique to Lachish and demonstrate the importance of the site in the region. Finally, although the Iron Age architectural feature in Area P was not fully excavated, its resemblance to similar stone structures at Megiddo, Hazor, and Beer Sheva could indicate that a monu-



mental subterranean water system remains below. Höflmayer and Streit plan to return to Tel Lachish in the summer of 2024 to extend the excavations related to the palace and the possible water system. (Robert D. Bates)



Lachish Ewer Inscription.

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RANDOM SURVEY

Corbelled Vault Found:

During the Middle Bronze Age, Tel Shimron, located in the Jezreel Valley, was the center of the Canaanite kingdom of *Šam-anu* and is mentioned in the Egyptian Execration texts. At that time, the city had massive architecture consisting of stone foundations below thousands of mudbricks, in places up to 4.8 m (16 ft) high. During the excavations, archaeologists recently found the earliest corbelled vault in the Levant, dating to ca. 1800 BC. Made of unfired mudbrick, the vault was built into a tower on the south side of the acropolis.

Ancient Mound to be Relocated:

The Pre-pottery Neolithic-period mound of Gre Filla in southeastern Turkey will be relocated due to the Ambar Dam project that will flood its current location on the alluvial plain formed by the tributaries of the Upper Tigris valley. Salvage excavations have so far discovered a temple and more than 2500 artifacts.

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Dating the Ishtar Gate:

The Ishtar Gate was excavated between 1902-1914 and dated to Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 BC) from a cuneiform inscription. This occurred before the advent of modern dating techniques, e.g., archaeomagnetism, which can plot the intensity of the earth's magnetic field over time, and date clay objects from the position of iron oxides and ferromagnetic particles within. A new study, using two mm chunks of 32 glazed bricks, indicates that the gate, which was built in three construction phases, was built within a short period of time and was completed by 569 BC.

Roman Concrete:

Unlike its modern counterpart, buildings made of Roman concrete have remained for ca. 2000 years. The reason for this is Roman concrete had lime clasts, indicating that it was formed under conditions of high temperatures and low humidity. This suggests the process of hot mixing, where lime is added to the mixture before the water, reducing curing and settling times, and allowing for faster construction. The solution could also self-heal small cracks.

Tomb Found on Malta:

A ca. 2,000 year-old rock-cut tomb, dating to the Punic period, was recently excavated on Malta. Urns located on the sides of the chamber still held the cremated ashes. An amphora and several small jars were also found.

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