

REVIEWS

USSISHKIN, DAVID: *The Renewed Excavations at Lachish (1973–1994)*. 2004. Five vols. Pp. xxii, 2754, 14 colour plates. Emery and Claire Yass Publications in Archaeology, Tel Aviv. Price: US\$250.

Owing to the complex problems of the archaeology of Jerusalem, the role of ‘type-site’ for ancient Judah has fallen to Tell ed-Duweir or Tel Lachish, so named as its identification with the biblical Lachish is now beyond reasonable doubt. Yet the interest and importance of Lachish extends far beyond Iron Age Judah: it was a major city during the Late and Middle Bronze Ages and was settled during the Early Bronze Age, Chalcolithic and Neolithic. The site has also been excavated by some outstanding teams, first British — directed by James Starkey from 1932 to 1938, and Olga Tufnell in 1938 — and then Israeli — led by Yohanan Aharoni in 1966 and 1968, and David Ussishkin between 1973 and 1987. The new volumes publish Ussishkin’s excavations which, while they closed in 1987, continued with post-excavation work (including conservation and reconstruction) until 2002. Though the wait has been long, it is understandable for such a monumental work and has been less painful than that for some other sites, where there is a feeling of being starved of even the most basic information concerning stratigraphy or important new finds. Nor have Ussishkin and his colleagues been lax in publishing interim reports and studies (see bibliography for some examples).

A bonus of the new reports is that many chapters dealing with specific types of find also include those from earlier excavations — for example, the treatment of Aegean pottery by Hankey *et al.* (ch. 22) catalogues a large number of Mycenaean finds which remained unpublished from the British excavations; Gottlieb (ch. 27, A) treats the Iron Age arrowheads found in all the excavations; and Lemaire (ch. 29, A) includes not only Hebrew inscriptions from the Israeli excavations, but an invaluable new transcription and translation of the ‘Lachish Letters’ discovered by Starkey and originally published by Torczyner as *Lachish I* (1938). Such chapters serve to remind us of the sheer richness of the archaeology of Lachish and of its historical and chronological importance. But more questions than answers sometimes arise from the treatments in the final reports.

For example, the LBA bowl fragments at Lachish (and nearby Tell Sera^c) with hieratic inscriptions (Sweeney, Ch. 24, B; Ussishkin, p. 64) are automatically taken as evidence of an Egyptian bureaucracy, with the regnal years on some bowls assumed to be pharaonic. Yet the lack of Egyptian parallels, curiosities in the hieratic, the possible use of a Hebrew word for grain (Lachish Hieratic Inscription 1 — see Goldwasser 1984, 78), the local manufacture of the bowls and the assumption that they record tax for a local temple, surely open other possibilities. After Higginbotham’s study (2000) of the emulation of Egyptian culture by the local rulers of LBA Palestine, would it be too daring to ask whether such inscriptions are actually pharaonic? After all, four of the ten (extremely short) inscriptions from Lachish (pp. 1601–1617) actually mention a ‘foreign ruler’, while a non-Egyptian word is used for what appears to be the name of a scribe or scribal institution (p. 1610). As Higginbotham (2000, 134) has stressed, we do not really know who employed the hieratic scribe at Lachish.

On a related matter, Ussishkin is too eager to characterise the LBA temple of Str. VI as Egyptian, though he has acknowledged (Ussishkin 1993, 201) he was mistaken in having once described its plan as Egyptian, now accepting that it is typically Canaanite (p. 266). Earlier, Ussishkin (1985, 221) claimed that a host of other features were ‘apparently in the Egyptian tradition’, including the ‘well laid brick floors, the painted plaster walls and the generous use of cedar of Lebanon’. The last suggestion is sublimely Egyptocentric but, fortunately, along with the brick floors, has been dropped from the final reports as evidence of Egyptian influence. Nevertheless Ussishkin maintains that the ‘use of wall paintings in thirteenth-twelfth centuries Canaan was introduced from Egypt’ (p. 266), but can this be so confidently stated, when mural painting has a venerable tradition in the Levant, going back at least to the Middle Bronze Age (e.g. at Tel Kabri and Alalakh)? The only clear evidence of Egyptian input seems to come from the style of certain (octagonal) column fragments and some of the temple finds, such as alabaster and faience vessels and painted ostrich shells (Clamer, Ch. 21). The pottery is all local: ‘There are no Egyptian imports, and only one bowl type appears to be influenced by an Egyptian prototype. . .’ (Clamer, p. 1299). There is no evidence of any Egyptian cult, and Ussishkin

agrees that 'the Lachish structure was a Canaanite temple dedicated to the cult of local deities. . .' (p. 267). The facts suggest we are looking at a Canaanite temple incorporating some Egyptian, or egyptianising, elements (cf. Higginbotham 2000, 109). Yet, for some reason, Ussishkin feels the need to state (p. 65) that: 'The Egyptian character of the Level VI temple, and possibly of the royal acropolis, should again be emphasized'.

A similar dogmatism tinges discussion of the crucial role played by Lachish in the question of late Iron Age chronology. The longstanding controversy over the dating of Lachish III was once described by Ussishkin (1982, 25) as 'one of the most serious and central dating problems in Palestinian archaeology'. While one school (Starkey, Albright, Buchanan, Wright, Kenyon, Lapp, Cross, Lance, Tushingham, Holladay, etc.) ascribed its destruction to Nebuchadrezzar II in 597 BC, another (Tufnell, Aharoni, Amiran, Barnett, Mazar, Rainey, Ussishkin, etc.) argued that Lachish III was destroyed more than a century earlier, by Sennacherib in 701 BC. The tide was turned in favour of 701 BC by a 1977 article of Ussishkin, who now feels that the matter is settled: 'It should be emphasized that this chronological conclusion is presently unanimously accepted in the scholarly world.' (p. 89).

The switch to 701 BC has brought about a massive upheaval in dating, with repercussions for every late Iron Age site in Judah. Yet the nature of the case allegedly clinching the 701 BC date is often misunderstood and needs reiteration. The present reviewer and colleagues have long stressed caution (James *et al.* 1991, 171–178; James 2004, 53), as the case does not depend on new evidence from Lachish III, but rather on the lack of evidence from other strata for a presumed Assyrian destruction — by Sennacherib in 701 BC. Ussishkin spells this out himself (p. 89):

The conclusion is still based essentially on the indirect evidence of the biblical and Assyrian sources and the direct evidence of the Assyrian reliefs, which indicate that Lachish was an important Judean fortified city conquered by the Assyrian army. However, the renewed excavations clarified the stratigraphy of the site and demonstrated that between the last Canaanite city of Level VI. . . and the Judean fortress of Level II, only one Iron Age level is represented by a fortified city and was destroyed by fire, that is, Level III. Hence Level III must be identified with the Judean city attacked and destroyed by the Assyrian army in 701 BCE.

There is a slight awkwardness in the English here, where 'only one Iron Age level represented by a fortified city was destroyed by fire' would have been better. Lachish V was not fortified, but Lachish IV was, its walls continuing in use (with no signs of restoration) into the time of Str. III (p. 83). Hence comparisons of the city shown on the famous Lachish reliefs of Sennacherib (pp. 740–741) with the archaeology apply as much to Str. IV as they do to III. But Ussishkin rules out Lachish IV as the city attacked by Sennacherib because, although it 'came to a sudden end' (which he dates to c. 760 BC), he explains this as 'apparently due to an earthquake', stating that 'no remains of destruction by fire were detected in the monumental buildings or in the domestic structures' (p. 83). Yet there is a subtle difference of emphasis in Ch. 9, co-authored with Gabriel Barkay: 'It is quite possible that this phase was destroyed by an earthquake rather than intentionally destroyed by human attackers, though no unequivocal proof of this is available' (p. 447).

Thus, by the excavators' own admission, the possibility that Lachish IV was destroyed by human agency has not been ruled out. (See now Fantalkin and Finkelstein 2006, 22–23, who argue against the idea that an earthquake c. 760 BC affected Lachish IV and other Judahite sites.) Further, the point that no signs of fire were detected in the destruction of Lachish IV is immaterial. Neither the biblical nor Assyrian records state that Sennacherib burnt Lachish. It is for this reason that Ussishkin wisely restricts himself (in the above quotation) to stating that the Assyrian reliefs 'indicate that Lachish was. . . conquered by the Assyrian army'. The siege was undoubtedly a bitter one, but the one thing missing from the Lachish reliefs is any indication that the Assyrians burnt the city after capturing it. Reference to firing or complete destruction is also conspicuously absent from Sennacherib's accounts of his campaign in Judah. In fact, his Nebi Yunus Inscription (Luckenbill 1927, 153–154) specifies the burning and/or utter ruination of enemy towns in the entries for each of his first seven campaigns — except for that against Judah. Much more could be said on this point, but Ussishkin's own admission will suffice: 'the burning and destruction of Lachish are not specifically recorded in Sennacherib's annals' (Ussishkin 1977, 30). (Unfortunately, a remark of this kind is missing from the brief discussion in the final reports, pp. 88–89.) Thus, the logic for dating Lachish III's destruction to 701 BC is seriously flawed. This may be a particularly large, and perhaps overly sour, lemon for many archaeologists to

swallow — not only those who studied with Ussishkin but those taught by Mazar (1984, 47), who stated that the renewed excavations had produced ‘unequivocal’ evidence that Lachish III ‘has now been securely dated to 701 B.C.E.’. Yet ideas in archaeology all too easily become ‘facts’ through familiarity, repetition or (as in this publication) appeal to (alleged) scholarly unanimity. This is not to say that 701 BC has been ruled out, or that the old date of 597 BC should be resurrected. However, 701 BC has no solid basis in the available historical records and other possibilities need to be considered, urgently and open-mindedly, before the date of Lachish III is set in so much concrete that even its knock-on effects for other sites become themselves treated as ‘fact’.

As it happens, the Lachish dating ‘revolution’ has not been problem free (see James 2004, 52–53). For example, there is a discernable and growing tension between the chronologies of Judahite and Edomite pottery. The latter, dated to the 7th century (by links with Assyrian–Babylonian–Persian chronology) is now, uncomfortably, being identified in earlier strata in Judah, at sites belonging to the Lachish III horizon of the 8th century (see Singer-Avitz 2004; Na’aman and Thureau-Sussely 2006). Another ramification concerns the vexed issue of the Judahite storage vessels with royal (*mlk*) impressions. More examples are known from Lachish than any other site, an updated catalogue being provided in Ch. 29, C by Barkay and Vaughn. Since Ussishkin’s 1977 article, there has been a tendency to assume that the floruit of the *mlk*-jar ceased with the destruction of Lachish III in 701 BC, reinforced by the argument of Na’aman (1979, 1986) that all the vessels were manufactured in the reign of Hezekiah to store rations in preparation against Sennacherib’s impending attack. Yet, as Mazar and others have frequently pointed out, *mlk* jars are found at many sites (such as Tel Batash) in strata deemed to be 7th century (see e.g. Mazar, Amit and Ilan 1996, 208–209; Grená 2004, 333–338; van der Veen forthcoming, Excursus 1), including a number of one-period settlements. Vaughn (1999) vigorously disputed the value of such contexts, though there appears to be a softening of his opinion here, with the statement (co-authored with Barkay):

It is possible that the royal storage jars continued in use elsewhere in Judah during the early part of the seventh century BCE, when Lachish lay in ruins (p. 2169, n. 16). Likewise, Ussishkin concludes (p. 2142) that ‘the stratigraphic evidence from Lachish... does not indicate whether or not they [*mlk*-jars] may have continued in use in other parts of Judah during the earlier part of the seventh century B.C.

Here (hopefully) are the seeds of a more realistic picture for the royal storage jars, without the strict packaging into two discrete groups, one (*mlk*) c. 700 BC, the other (with rosettes) c. 600 BC, with no explained connection. The rosette jars are a development from the *mlk*, and neutron activation analysis suggests they were produced at a common centre in the Shephelah (Zimhoni, pp. 1800–1801) — raising the awkward idea that a royal factory here was closed and re-opened almost a century later without any continuity in tradition. Hence the key question is not just whether *mlk*-jars continued in use (with Mazar), but whether they continued to be manufactured after the fall of Lachish III — a possibility recently touched on by Gitin (2006, 521), in view of the large number of *mlk*-type jars (unstamped) recovered from the destruction level of Ekron IB, dating either to 604 BC (Gitin) or c. 570 BC (James 2006). More broadly, whenever Lachish III fell, because it was abandoned for some decades before rebuilding, its destruction cannot be used to define the end of the ‘Lachish III horizon’ of pottery as a whole, any more than it does the end of the *mlk* jars. For example, as Zimhoni notes (p. 1803), the storage jars from Tel ‘Ira and Tel Haror, otherwise dated to the 7th century BC, ‘are similar to those of Lachish III, but not to those of Lachish II. At present there is a slight incompatibility between the finds of Lachish and those of Tel ‘Ira and Tel Haror...’

To the editor’s credit such problems are aired in the final reports. Many questions still surround the famous siege ramp, presumed to have been built by the conquerors of Lachish III. As already noted in preliminary reports (Ussishkin 1983, 138; 1996, 40, n. 5), one part of the ramp appears to cover a roadway rebuilt in the time of Lachish II. After reviewing some possibilities, Ussishkin (pp. 557, 716–718) leaves the puzzle open. The relationship between the two stages of construction discerned in the ramp is still problematic: the upper layer consists simply of boulders, and Ussishkin describes their interpretation as a second stage of the ramp as ‘somewhat speculative’, noting suggestions made during the excavations that it might relate to Str. II, though he considers this unlikely (p. 721). One might also ask why the builders of Lachish II never cleared away the ramp raised against the earlier city. With due foresight, Ussishkin has left a large part of the ramp intact for future investigation.

The chapter on Persian and Hellenistic pottery (30) by Fantalkin and Tal also engages chronological problems, arguing that as the bulk of the dateable Attic imports belong to the 4th century BC, the foundation of Lachish I should lie nearer to c. 400 BC than the 450 BC argued by Tufnell. (See also Fantalkin and Tal 2006, and for a contrary view Edelman 2005, 271–274.)

The Iron Age pottery is covered in two chapters (25, 26) by the late Orna Zimhoni, treating Str V–IV and III–II, respectively. (The first was her MA thesis.) Already published in a posthumous collection of papers (Zimhoni 1997, 57–178; the second reprinted from Tel Aviv 17, 1990), both are included here in their entirety, with the useful difference that the (augmented) pottery figures are presented by loci rather than pottery group. Zimhoni's analysis of the Str. V–IV pottery is a model of clarity and caution, giving a balanced assessment of the dating possibilities (though arguably hamstrung by the 'fixed point' of 701 BC for the end of Lachish III). But problems are apparent in the chapter on Lachish III–II, where the editors stress the difficulty of completing Zimhoni's work after her untimely death. For example, the invaluable chapter (36, B) by Goren *et al.* gives the results of petrographic analyses, largely performed at the request of Zimhoni. These demonstrate, *inter alia*, that three storage jars from Str. III were made on the Phoenician coast, confirming that the deduction (obvious from their appearance) that they are Phoenician 'torpedo storage-jars', well known from late 8th–7th century Tyre. Both the table of petrographic analysis (p. 2562) and the figure captions describe these and similar examples (Figs. 26.11:10; 26.19:3; 26.22:8–10; 26.24:11, 12) as type 'SJ-6'. The only SJ-6 discussed in the text (p. 1803; Fig. 26.49) is a completely different vessel, a handleless storage jar known only from Str. II. Zimhoni (perhaps as an interim measure?) had two series of Storage Jar numbers each starting with 'SJ-1', for Lachish III and II, respectively, but no Str. III/SJ-6 is defined in the text. The problem, as the editor frankly explains, is that while they did their best to update the labelling of the pottery groups 'according to the system finalized shortly before her death. . . since the text which was to accompany the figures was never completed, many of the group designations found in the captions are nowhere defined or discussed' (p. 1789). Curiously, 'SJ 6' is used by Bikai (2003, 232) for one of her Tyrian groups of torpedo jars and one wonders whether this might have crept into the published tables for Lachish III, via Zimhoni's unfinished notes.

Still, at the very least, we have, as Ussishkin stresses (through the figures and captions) a comprehensive publication of the Lachish III–II pottery recovered from the renewed excavations. The petrographic analyses have confirmed a very important phenomenon — imports of Phoenician trading vessels in Lachish III. Elsewhere, notably at Hazor, such jars have been the subject of a protracted (25-year) debate over their provenance (see most recently Gilboa *et al.* 2004, 688–692), carried out somewhat in the dark, due to the absence of satisfactory petrographic analyses. At Lachish the analysis provides certain evidence for trade between Phoenicia and the Shephelah, a forerunner to the Phoenician settlements of this region evident in early Hellenistic times (Kokkinos 1998, 45–46, 51). Starkey, whose principal aim in excavating Lachish was to elucidate the impact of foreign cultures on southern Palestine (pp. 27–28) would have been delighted to hear the result.

The matter should be pursued further, as Zimhoni surely intended in submitting these jars for analysis. The tragedy is that she did not live to complete her work. Fittingly, the new volumes are dedicated to her memory as well as those of Olga Tufnell and Mary Davis (who helped secure funding for the excavations).

Quibbles aside, massive praise is due to David Ussishkin, in having driven through the colossal project of excavation, post-excavation work and now publication, where he also undertook the lion's share of the writing. The new volumes — overall, a model of publication — will enable others (than the excavators) to come to their own views. The five volumes are magnificently produced: the quality of the illustration, paper, binding and (largely) the editing are superb, while the price, for such a massive work, is a snip (compared with the scandalous prices of European publishers such as Brill), bringing it within the reach not only of libraries' but even individual researchers' pockets. This provides the icing on the cake to Ussishkin's achievement with these publications. He has pulled off a magnificent coup, beginning with the early 1970s when he conceived the project and tenaciously drummed up funding (pp. 3–8) to the co-ordination of no less than 62 other scholars in writing the final reports. One can only take one's hat off to the amount of skill, energy and time needed for such a herculean project.

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ROSENBERG, STEPHEN GABRIEL: *Airag al-Amir, The Architecture of the Tobiads* (BAR International Series 1544), 2006. Pp. xiv, 229, 88 black & white plates and one plate of colour photographs. Oxford: Hadrian Books. ISBN 1-84171-757-6. Softcover. Price £42.

The impressive ruins at Airag al-Amir (also transliterated from the Arabic as 'Iraq al-Amir, 'Araq el-Emir, and suchlike) in trans-Jordan, situated between Jericho and Amman, have captured the interest of Western scholars since they were first recorded in the travel accounts of Charles Irby and