



## Tell Qudadi: An Iron Age IIB fortress on the central Mediterranean coast of Israel

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Tell Qudadi: An Iron Age IIB fortress on the central Mediterranean coast of Israel**, by Fantalkin, A., and Tal, O. (eds) (*with References to Earlier and Later Periods*) (*Colloquia Antiqua* 15), 2015. Pp. xx + 242. Leuven: Peeters. ISBN: 978-9-04293-182-4. €84.00.

This short but richly documented and illustrated book is part of the series *Colloquia Antiqua*, directed by Gocha R. Tsetskhladze, whose original aim, as may be read on the Web, was “to publish monographs and collections of papers devoted to the study of the periphery of the ancient world, its so-called barbarian milieu, the activities thereabouts of Greeks and Romans, and the relations between them and local peoples”. In this particular case, the series editor (as he himself implies on p. vii) was taken in by the unique “tidbit” offered by the two authors: that of studying in depth the results of an older (and largely unpublished) excavation—Tell Qudadi, on the Mediterranean coast of Israel along the estuary of the Yarkon river—from a variety of written and photographic sources, as well as re-examining first-hand the finds in an updated and critical light, and finally presenting a set of results and conclusions which radically differ from the previously gained ones. Thus, even if only “local peoples” such as Israelites, Judahites and their oppressors from the East make their appearance in this work, and neither “barbarians” nor peripheral areas of the Classical world are present, Tsetskhladze may be credited with a particularly interesting editorial “catch”. And the fact that both of the authors declare that they have been fascinated by the Tell Qudadi site and its material remains since their PhD days (p. ix), also lends a particular flavour to their collaborative endeavour, which functionally combines their different but partially overlapping archaeological specializations (Fantalkin for the pre-Classical period, Tal for the Classical and Medieval periods).

Fantalkin and Tal are jointly responsible for the main chapters of the book (1–4), of varying length but mainly subdivided into different sections; the sole acknowledged external contribution here is the technical support by M. Iserlis for section 3.2 (pp. 70–80) on the optical mineralogy analysis of selected pottery finds of IA IIB date. On the other hand, specific features or finds are treated by various specialists and are inserted between the chapters as brief “appendices” (five in number, A–E). Not being gathered at the end, they may be rather viewed as excursions or interspersed addenda: the place-name Qudadi is studied by R. Zadok (p. 11), the earliest pottery finds (down to the MBA) by R. Gophna and I. Paz (pp. 107–11), the flint tools by S. Krispin (p. 112), a LIA earring by B. Sass (p. 113), and a Roman period earring by R. Rosenthal-Heginbottom (p. 114–15).

Instead, actual appendices to the central part of the book concerning the archaeological evidence (chapters 2 and 3) are offered by the authors in the tables on pp. 116–32 regarding the archaeological loci, soil types, and stratigraphy according to different perspectives; in the same vein, the detailed documentation of all finds, blending photographs and pottery profiles or other drawings, occupies a further vast section (pp. 133–86, figs. 72–118). To all this may be added a rewarding set of b/w photographs (and maps) of Tell Qudadi in the different periods of its discovery and investigation from WWI to the 1930s, and of the excavated sections of the site, functionally interspersed within the main text (figs 1–71). Now, the complexity of this overall apparatus—which does not, however, particularly deter from a continuous reading of the main text—reflects the equally complex “stratigraphy” of the two authors’

investigation into the site, from its earliest recognition exactly one century ago to the new, and multiple, insights and perspectives offered by the present-day status of Israeli archaeology.

In a nutshell (ch. 1, pp. 13–44), Tell Qudadi, located on the right bank of the Yarkon estuary on the southernmost reaches of the coastal (or Sharon) plain—nowadays by the seaside N of the Tel Aviv city centre—lies in an area of a complex geomorphological nature, blending sediments swept northwards from the Nile by coastal currents and alluvium originating inland, even as far as Samaria. The resulting soil profile combines a coastal strip, made of different ridges of *kurkar* (fossilised sandstone), a more internal set of hills of *hamra* (red loam), and—still more inland—a long and narrow swale (*marzeva*) covered by fertile silty soil: all these units with their sub-types are studied in detail (pp. 13–21). The site was a military stronghold of the British in 1917, in the struggle to gain terrain northwards against the Turks (pp. 1, 22–27); still today, a marble column of Byzantine date erected shortly after marks the site as a memorial of the war operations, with inscriptions in English and Hebrew, and fragments of ordnance were preserved among the finds (figs 19–20). The recognition of the area as of archaeological interest began in 1934, but serious competition by the requirements of modernity was soon provided: first by a lighthouse and then, much more gravely, by the new power station for the Tel Aviv area named after a Marquess of Reading (and still today known by this name), which caused a vast destruction to the ancient *tell*, not only through outright mechanical digs but also through its complementary water channels and other structures (see the poignant photographs on figs 25–32, 43). Credit goes to the director of the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem, P.L.O. Guy, for being the first to identify Tell Qudadi as an endangered site in the late 1930s, with emphasis on its alleged biblical (Solomonic) connections, thus preparing the ground for the salvage excavation in 1937–38 by E.L. Sukenik and S. Yeivin, with the participation of a young Nahman Avigad, and the conservation of the area in 1941. Since that time, Tell Qudadi may be said to have been kept safe and protected, even as a tourist attraction—although at least half of the original site had been demolished, and the excavated surface (cf. fig. 44) reached at most some 40 metres in width, with specific attention to the easternmost sector of some 15 metres, parts of which were certainly washed out by the sea (see figs 11, 41).

What did this limited archaeological area indicate to the first investigators (whose published results are only of a few pages' length), and what does it show at present after the complete re-examination of the data (original logbooks/photos, finds kept in different institutions) and new fieldwork by the two authors? In chapter 2 (pp. 45–68), it is clearly explained that Sukenik and Yeivin noted the existence of a fortress formed by six casemate rooms, with two distinct archaeological phases, identified by relevant walls and floors, where pottery was retrieved in burnt layers.

However, the stratigraphical re-examination by Fantalkin and Tal, also supported by probes, suggests that the situation is more complex: a lower casemate structure (stratum V, phase 9) is a mere stone foundation for overlying buildings, which was filled by beach sand over time. Above this foundation of the first fortress, a fill of brown earth (phase 8) and then a thick occupation layer which was destroyed (phase 7) may be made out, surmounted by a floor of shells (phase 6) sealed by an occupation layer (phase 5), in its turn lying below a stone pavement (phase 4) and a destruction layer (phase 3)—all relevant to the second fortress (stratum IV–III). Finally, a layer of dark earth (phase 2) and the surface layer (phase 1) may be considered not related to this later fortress (stratum III–II). In sum, while the earlier archaeologists were confident that a stratigraphic continuity between the earlier and later fortresses was apparent, the two authors are extremely sceptical on an actual physical link between the two structures (p. 46): in any case, the roughly hewn stone (*kurkar*) foundation of the earliest fortress with a square-shaped open courtyard, flanked by rows of casemate

rooms, “exhibits one of the earliest appearances of a military-oriented type of building, whose origins can be found in Mesopotamia” (p. 50).

This fortress in stratum V (see fig. 12) is considered to be of Iron Age date, with an entrance to the inner courtyard located in relation to external pillars, and it had a 1.5 m thick wall which “was an inner construction of a larger massive foundation which had a stepped facade” (p. 53), reaching some 2.5 m, as shown by the excavation photographs (figs 45–46), possibly serving as a stone glacis visible from afar. The overlying floors and occupation layers in strata IV and III, with the relevant pottery, are only sparsely connected to the walls (i.e. they are “floating”), but minimal connections may in fact be established. In Stratum III an inset-offset wall of rough *kurkar* may be related to the later phase of the fortress, whose remains may have almost entirely obliterated the earlier glacis and stepped facade. The main structural difference with the earlier building lies in the widened entrance, with a moderately ascending ramp. This feature points a quite different layout between the overall facade and the relevant entrances of the two buildings (p. 56 and fig. 12). The upper fortress was associated with Iron Age IIB finds. Finally, the topmost phases do not seem to show a coherent combination of finds with structures, but certainly a plastered tripartite installation paved with white mosaic stones of Late Roman/Byzantine times was built into the inset-offset wall of the IA IIB fortress. Its use may have been connected to the specific environment (fish tanks, p. 61), whereas the older hypothesis of houses and a *balneum* of Byzantine date is discarded by the authors. Isolated finds outside the perimeter of the fortress are represented by a wall of the Persian period, and a structure with two free-standing pillars which could have represented an olive-oil press or other industrial installation, mainly on the basis of stone weights found nearby (pp. 65–66).

In Chapter 3, which represents the main part of the book (pp. 69–186), the finds from secure stratigraphic contexts are presented and studied in extreme detail. A sampler of 60 vessels was subjected to an optical mineralogy analysis (pp. 70–81) which yielded 11 types of petrographic components, ranging from the Sharon coast and plain to the Shephelah and the Negev area (see results on table 1, pp. 116–23). Also five soil samples, “taken in order to identify possible local clay sources” (p. 70) are analysed in a table on p. 124. The reason for the use throughout the book, and especially in this chapter, of the term *terra rosa* instead of the scientifically credited *terra rossa* (Italian for “red soil”)<sup>1</sup> escapes this reviewer—also for its slightly incongruous nature, since *rosa* means “pink” in Italian.

The remainder of the chapter deals, in extreme detail, with pottery types and other small finds, for which the reader is required to perform a continuous to-and-fro movement with the many appended tabular layouts and illustrations mentioned above. Here again, the results of petrographic analyses are taken up, together with the most relevant parallels with wares retrieved elsewhere in Israel, Lebanon, Egypt, or elsewhere. Of particular note are: the high frequency of cooking-pots (especially of type CP4, pp. 88–89); the small but consistent group of well-preserved loom-weights (pp. 93–94); and the relatively numerous imported wares of Lesbian and other Aegean origin, in contrast with an absence of Cypriot imports (pp. 94–101). Finally, the unstratified material is studied, and related to IA or later contexts (pp. 104–106).

The overall picture of the Tell Qudadi site to be deduced from all the archaeological evidence is drawn in Chapter 4 (pp. 187–213). The authors single out three well-defined

<sup>1</sup>See, just by way of example, I. Seginer *et al.*, Runoff and Erosion Studies in a Mountainous Terra-Rossa Region in Israel, *International Association of Scientific Hydrology Bulletin*, 7/IV (1962), 79–92 (<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02626666209493284>); J. Dan *et al.*, The Soil Association Map of Israel (1:1,000,000), *Israel Journal of Earth-Sciences* 21 (1972), 29–49 (see esp. p. 35). However, it may be noted that, as an individual typo, *terra rosa* for *terra rossa* is—unfortunately—to be found more than a few times in English-language scientific publications.

ceramic assemblages linked to Strata IV, IIIB and IIIA, both in a comparative view with other sites in Israel (pp. 187–88) and on the basis of the imported wares (pp. 189–90), which point to an overall occupation during the IA IIB phase: on the basis of ongoing discussion in the Israeli archaeological milieu (and especially by the “Finkelstein school”), this phase is now considered to have lasted much more than previously held, i.e. up to some 150 years. Thus, the authors not only dispense with the “Solomonic” connections indicated by the earlier excavators, suggesting a date for the first fortress of almost two centuries later, but also compact the overall occupation of both fortresses to a period of approximately one century (p. 191). In a nutshell, the first fortress and its destruction should be dated to the late 8th century BC (Strata V-IV), whereas the later occupation phase and the second architectural phase (Stratum IIIB) would span the 7th century BCE, with a final destruction occurring around 640–635 BCE (Stratum IIIA). No comprehensive chronology for the later finds (Strata III to I) is suggested.

This revised chronology is then viewed in its implications, both archaeological and historical (pp. 191–195). Given that, in the archaeological context of the southern Levant, a first destruction layer connected with IA IIB ceramic assemblages is normally associated with the Neo-Assyrian campaigns, from Tiglath-pileser III to Sennacherib (c. 732–700 BC), and that a second set, associated with IA IIC pottery, is associated with the Neo-Babylonian campaigns (end of 7th/early 6<sup>th</sup> century BC), the intermediate period of *pax assyriaca* is extremely difficult to trace, and the continuation of IA IIB assemblages throughout the 7th century has been deemed likely, but hitherto unprovable. The Tell Qudadi case, with the aid of its Aegean ceramic correlations, would thus represent a concrete benchmark for this continuity. On the other hand, to postulate a final destruction of the site in the second half of the 7th century—thus well after Sennacherib, and well before the Neo-Babylonian invasions—would imply a reappraisal of some historical possibilities hitherto clouded by silence and obscurity, from Egyptian military interventions to the effects of Esarhaddon’s policies on his way to Egypt, or even to the unrest of neighbouring tribal chiefs. The authors moreover freely admit (p. 194) that these hypothetical scenarios apply essentially to Judah, but wind their way around this difficulty by stating that “the general characteristics and trends in ceramic forms and vessels’ treatment of Iron Age IIB are not that different across the whole (*sic*) southern Palestine, creating a ceramic *koine*, connected to Phoenicia as well” (*ibid.*). The pursuit of discussion and further discoveries will certainly shed light on the correctness of this—undoubtedly innovative—approach.

Certainly, the date suggested for the final destruction of the later Tell Qudadi fortress coincides by and large with the withdrawal of the Assyrians from the southern Levant. But did the Assyrians themselves control the fortress of Tell Qudadi during the 7th century BC? This problem is tackled in section 4.2 (pp. 195–205). In view of the current state of research on the ‘Assyrianisation’ of the coastal area, with multiple archaeological examples of *emporion* and fortresses, “one may reasonably assume that Tell Qudadi was an integral part of the fortresses and trade stations built during the period of Neo-Assyrian domination” (p. 196). But who actually built and maintained the Tell Qudadi fortress? On the basis of previously studied cases, it is stated that the lack of specifically Mesopotamian architectural features and/or Neo-Assyrian pottery types are not hindrances to an ascription of a site to the Assyrian-dominated horizon in the studied area. Of the many alternative scenarios for a local conduction of the Tell Qudadi fortress under Assyrian supervision, an Ashkelonian enclave in the Joppa area during Sennacherib’s conquest, or the return to power of Padi of Ekron following the Assyrian king’s intervention against Jerusalem are taken into due account by the authors (pp. 198–200). Their preferred scenario, however, is the insertion of Tell Qudadi into an element of the logistical (and commercial) network established by the Assyrians around

Gezer, since the time of Tiglath-pileser III (pp. 200–202). More enigmatic is the degree of Achaemenid penetration into the area (pp. 203–205): the presence of *šd šrn* in the Phoenician inscription of ʿEšmun-ʿazor would seem to imply that the coastal plain fell in the late 6th century under the hegemony of the vassal kings of Sidon, showing continuity with IA IIB and an even more intense occupation than the earlier phase. However, it must be recalled that the scanty remains of Tell Qudadi for this period prevent any precise characterisation of the site under Persian domination.

Finally, in section 4.3 (pp. 205–11), the authors tackle a *longue durée* perspective relevant to the long-discussed problems of (political) fragmentation and (territorial) connectivity as obstacles to delineate the history of coastal Mediterranean landscapes (on the basis of Horden and Purcell’s post-Braudelian work of 2000), noting—in partial criticism of this view—that the specifics of the Tell Qudadi micro-region do, in fact, show the emergence of a coherent historical-contextual pattern of function and occupation. In a detailed reconstruction of the relation of the Yarkon estuary with the more southern port area of Joppa, the authors maintain that a shift in importance occurred between the later 2nd millennium and the early part of the following one, with Tell Qasile as a newly emerging site. Later, the rise of Ashdod and Ashkelon should be taken into account, with the coastal settlements around/in present-day Tel Aviv shifting between them according to the decisions of Sargon and Sen-nacherib vis-à-vis the vassals’ political correctness. Finally, as noted before, Tell Qudadi should have depended from a network established by the Assyrians at Gezer, before Joppa renewed its role as main coastal outlet under the Achaemenids.

The various themes developed in the book are, conclusively, summarized in seven points (pp. 211–13). Of the different issues, this reviewer especially appreciated the authors’ invitation (point vi) to produce “an updated typology for Iron Age IIB, one that would attempt to differentiate between early and late Iron Age IIB horizons”, so as to ascertain the presence/absence of intermediate types with IA IIA and IA IIC, also “using imported pottery as additional evidence” (p. 212).

In sum, the endeavour of Fantalkin and Tal, with their collaborators, is an excellent demonstration and all-round application of the combined methodologies nowadays present on the scene of Israeli archaeology and ancient history. Having cut the thick and multi-stranded mooring rope with “biblical archaeology” and its implications, the material available to the historian for the Sharon plain and Judah in the 8th–6th centuries (from Tiglath-pileser III to Nebuchadnezzar) is prevalently based on Mesopotamian textual evidence, which has its own pitfalls, and on historical geography, which must operate on a complex horizon of ancient settlement within a limited spatial radius. In this light, the role of accurate archaeological evaluations—such as the one performed in this book, meritorious not only for its revival of a hitherto “dead” excavation report in a detailed stratigraphic light, but also for its opportune highlighting of the western ceramic horizon for dating purposes—cannot be overrated as an instrument of fundamental support, and in fact of actual advancement, for the overall historical picture.

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