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Book Author(s): Michal Dayagi-Mendels

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Akhziv (biblical Achzib) is located on the northern coast of Israel, about 14 km north of 'Akko. The site was settled from the Middle Bronze Age to the Crusader period.

Achzib is mentioned twice in the Bible as a Canaanite city which the tribe of Asher failed to defeat (Joshua 19:29; Judges 1:31). In Assyrian records, Akzibi is referred to as a fortified city, conquered by Sennacherib in 701 BCE during his third campaign, along with Sidon, Sarepta and 'Akko (Luckenbill 1924:110).

Josephus described the town as situated on the seashore, calling it by its Greek name, Ekdippa (*Ant.* V, 85; XIV, 343; *War* I, 257). The Talmud mentions it several times as a town located on the border of the country and on the road leading northward from 'Akko. At the time, the town had a Jewish community and a synagogue.

In the Crusader period, the town was known as Casal Lamberti, while in Moslem times, it became ez-Zib, retaining the biblical name Achzib.

Excavations carried out on the northern part of the mound by Moshe Prausnitz revealed Middle Bronze Age fortifications which were destroyed at the beginning of the Late Bronze Age. There is some evidence of renewed building activity in that period, but by the end of the Late Bronze Age the fortifications were again in ruins. In the Iron Age, Akhziv enjoyed its greatest expansion. The two major Phoenician cemeteries situated east (er-Ras) and south (ez-Zib/Buqbaq) of the city date from this period. These cemeteries were in use without interruption well into the beginning of the Persian period.

Ben-Dor's Excavations at Akhziv, 1941–1944

In his diaries, Immanuel Ben-Dor described his archaeological work at Akhziv as follows:

The presence of ancient tombs has been known since the early twenties. In March 1921 the Department of Antiquities of the Mandatory Government of Palestine received a note

from an otherwise unknown person, Edmondo Durighello, who reported that he excavated about one hundred tombs near the village of ez-Zib. He employed for this purpose some two hundred workers from the neighboring villages. His activities seem to have been concentrated in the southern, Buqbaq cemetery. He says that the tombs contained merely funerary objects without 'any artistic interest.' He notes, however, the presence of a number of clay figurines, to which he rightly ascribes an Egypto-Phoenician style.

The Inspector of Antiquities, Y. Ory (Lederman) mentions in his report of May 1921 that an ancient cemetery probably exists south-east of the village.

In the summer of 1941 I came on an unofficial visit to the seaside resort of Nahariya, 6 km south of Achziv. I was informed by the late Dr. Otto Stiehl of Nahariya, an enthusiastic friend of antiquities, that some of the villagers of ez-Zib are engaged in looting ancient tombs. They offered some unusual pieces of unbroken pottery and clay figurines for sale in Nahariya. Since Dr. Stiehl knew the location of the tombs he accompanied me to the site. Several open shafts were visible with heaps of freshly dug-out earth, a quantity of broken red burnished and plain pottery lay about.

Two rectangular slabs of limestone lay face down near an opening of one of the tombs (later named Tomb I), and on being overturned they proved to bear inscriptions, each consisting of no more than two lines of incised letters in Phoenician script. The sun was setting and there was not much more to do but to secure the two inscriptions, to bring them to Jerusalem and to report to the Department. It was decided to begin excavating the tombs, first of all in order to prevent further looting and then to study the character of the cemetery. Later, Mr. Naim Effendi Makhoul, then Inspector of the northern district, was given the task of excavating some tombs. He was assisted by Najib Effendi Nasser, Junior Inspector of Antiquities, who was in charge of keeping the inventory of finds and keeping a diary.

Subsequently I joined the dig at various times, particularly in the subsequent seasons, sometimes leading the team and sometimes giving merely advice.

Ben-Dor later amended the diary:

The actual excavation was carried out at intervals, in the autumn of 1941, in the winter of 1942, in the summer of 1943 and in the spring of 1944. Each season lasted about one month. Then came 1947 with its troubled times, culminating in the division of Jerusalem. The objects from the Akhziv cemeteries were naturally housed in the Rockefeller Museum, apart from the small finds. Since a cold war persisted between the two states there was no possibility of seeing the material until the unification of Jerusalem in 1967.

The Southern Cemetery—Ez-Zib (Buqbaq)

The southern cemetery is situated on the Mediterranean shore, *c.* 1 km south of the tell. The name Buqbaq is onomatopoeic and derives from the peculiar sound produced by the seawater gushing through hollows in the rock.

Ben-Dor reports that the cemetery extends over an area of more than 5000 sq m of sand dunes. Depending on its location, the depth of the sand layers varies greatly; while it is merely 10 cm thick in the northern part of the site, it reaches a depth of over 2 m in the south. Below the sand is a layer of marl, with occasional pockets of rock chips or black soil. Further below is the bedrock, consisting of soft porous sandstone. The whole area is covered with sparse vegetation. There is nothing whatsoever on the surface that indicates the presence of tombs. How the tomb robbers discovered the tombs remains a puzzle; they may have accidentally come upon the first tomb and then probed for more. Fortunately, the robbers did a slipshod job, and large quantities of restorable and even complete pottery vessels, as well as small objects, could still be recovered from the looted tombs.

The search for new tombs proceeded with the digging of a series of trial trenches. Ben-Dor dug trenches 3–5 m wide, which branched off from one main trench across the area. Besides uncovering new tombs, these trenches yielded a great quantity of pottery, some dated later than the tombs, but for the most part contemporary, as well as a relatively large number of cult objects (chalices) and lamps, indicating that certain funerary rites may have been held outside and between the tombs.

The Eastern Cemetery—Er-Ras

This cemetery is located to the east of the tell, on a rock-spur which, in recent times, was planted mainly with olive

groves. The limestone rock here is much harder and more solid than in the southern Buqbaq cemetery.

Analysis of the Material

Analyzing the material from the two cemeteries excavated by Ben-Dor was not an easy undertaking. Various factors played a role here: the long period that had elapsed since the excavation, the rather inadequate methods of recording information, the incomplete surveying of tombs which can no longer be located, and the damage caused by man (war) and nature (insects). A serious information gap, among others, is the lack of data concerning burials, in particular with regard to the type of burial—inhumation or cremation—as well as the presence of skeletal material and the position, number, gender and age of the deceased. Moreover, no information exists regarding the disposition of the objects in relation to the burials.

Not all the tomb plans are available. The missing plans may have been lost over the years, or perhaps were never drawn up in the first place. Some tombs were described in the excavation diary but have no plan, whereas others have plans but lack written descriptions. In addition, the information on the tombs provided in the excavator's diary is often self-contradictory. The plans do not indicate the scale (although we have attempted to calculate scales), nor in many cases, the orientation of the tombs. We do not have a general plan of the ez-Zib (Buqbaq) cemetery, and therefore the relation of one tomb to another also remains unknown.

The material listed as "finds from trenches" has not been analyzed in this publication, due to lack of information concerning stratigraphy and other features in the trenches.

The aim of this publication is the presentation of the extraordinarily rich repertoire of Phoenician pottery, small finds and terracottas recovered from the Akhziv tombs. In comparison to previous publications of Phoenician pottery uncovered at sites in the Phoenician homeland, the Akhziv repertoire surpasses most of them in its rich and varied assemblages.

An attempt was made to date the tombs according to the pottery typology; however, given the lack of sufficient information, we could not deal with stratigraphic matters.