



ARAD: A Biblical City in Southern Palestine

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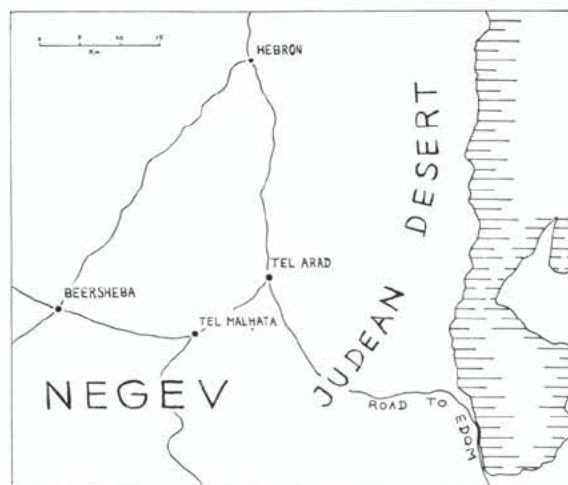
ARAD

A Biblical City in Southern Palestine

The first two seasons of excavation were carried out during the spring of 1962 and the summer of 1963, sponsored by the Hebrew University, the Israel Department of Antiquities and the Israel Exploration Society. The Arad Development Project, which is in charge of the construction of a new city nearby, carried a large part of the expedition's expenses. The first season's work was directed by Yohanan Aharoni and Ruth Amiran, assisted by Avraham Eitan and Moshe Kochavi. The second season's work was directed by Yohanan Aharoni (Ruth Amiran being occupied at Tell Nagila), assisted by Moshe Kochavi.

TELL ARAD, situated 20 miles east of Beersheba, is the first major biblical site to be excavated in the Negev, the semi-arid area of southern Palestine on the border of the Sinai desert. The first two seasons' campaigns carried out here show this to be an unusually rich and promising site, important in relation to many biblical problems and the earliest history of Palestine. The remains of the various periods are remarkably well preserved owing to the dryness and remoteness of the region.

Arad is known from the Bible as the central town



Map of the vicinity of Tell Arad.

of the eastern Negev during the Canaanite and Israelite periods. At the time of Israel's wandering in the desert "the Canaanite king of Arad, who dwelt in the Negev (South)" (Num. 21:1) controlled a good part of this southern area. He is described as the Israelite tribes' main obstacle in their attempt to penetrate Canaan from the desert, and he is said to have defeated them utterly at the city of Hormah (Num. 14:45, 33:40; Deut. 1:44).

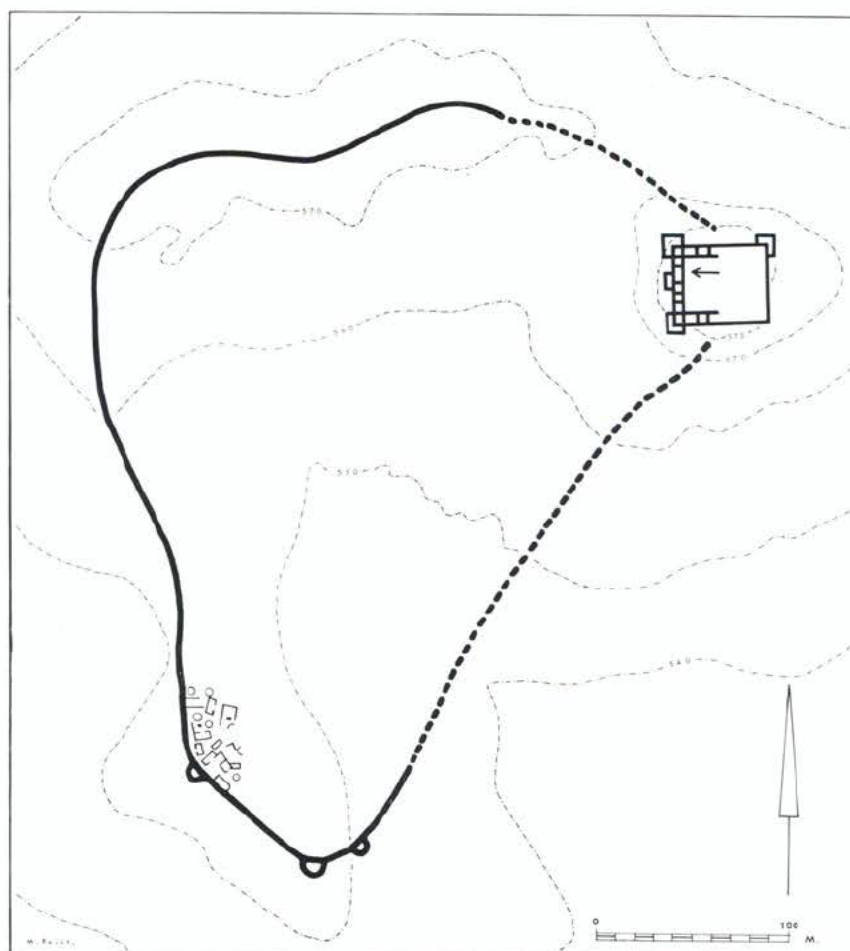
We do not know the exact date of the conquest of Canaanite Arad, but the king of the town is mentioned among the thirty-one rulers who were conquered by Joshua and the children of Israel (Josh. 12:14) and we learn about families of Kenites who came to live in "the Negev of Arad" (Judg. 1:16). Later, Arad appears in the city list of Judah, the second name mentioned in the important Negev district (= Eder of the Massoretic text, Josh. 15:21). As we have no further biblical references to Arad, it is only the excavations which testify to its importance during the period of the Israelite monarchy. The citadels built here by the kings of Israel and Judah protected the boundaries of the kingdom and controlled the main road to Edom and Elath. This road had a primary

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importance for the kingdom, owing to the copper mines of the Wadi Araba and to trade with South Arabia, where spices and perfumes were purchased. Caravans such as that of the queen of Sheba, described in the Bible, came to Arad on their way from the south, and here they passed the border of Judah proper. Shishak I of Egypt, who invaded Palestine ca. 920 B.C., five years after King Solomon's death, mentions in his inscription that he conquered the citadel of Arad and a place called Geber, which is probably biblical Ezion Geber, near Elath, at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba. We may assume that one of Shishak's aims in this campaign was to stop Judah's

commerce with South Arabia. The latest reference to Arad is in the *Onomasticon* of Eusebius (ca. 264-ca. 340), who mentions a village named Arad twenty Roman miles from Hebron.

THE MOUND OF ARAD consists of a small, high citadel and a large lower city. As a result of two seasons' work, seventeen strata of habitation have been discovered, beginning with the Chalcolithic period (ca. 3500 B.C.), and ending in the Arab period (ca. A.D. 800). The work of the first season centered mainly on the high part of the mound, where various citadels dating from the time of Solomon to the Roman period were discovered. During the second season the work was divided between the citadel and the lower



Plan of Tell Arad, showing excavation of citadel, fortification wall and section of town, in western area, which has been excavated. Arrow points to Israelite sanctuary.



Detail of the Early Bronze Age wall with a tower, only brushed from above but not yet excavated.



(Right) A typical Early Bronze house, with the bench around the wall, the stone table, and the door in one long wall.



General view of the site of Arad: in the foreground is the lower tell, with part of the Early Bronze Age fortification wall and one of the semicircular towers, and in the background is the high citadel mound.



The excavations in the western part of the lower tell, showing the rectangular houses, the round granaries and, at the right, the city wall.

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city, bringing to light in the latter area part of the early city and its fortifications. These proved to be one of the most interesting discoveries made so far, belonging to the beginning of urbanization in Palestine.

The earliest Chalcolithic settlement was apparently an unfortified village, similar to those recently excavated in the vicinity of Beersheba. However, while the latter were deserted before the beginning of the third millennium B.C., at Arad a large city was constructed during an early phase of the Canaanite period (Early Bronze Age I-II, 3150-2600 B.C.). Built ca. 3000 B.C., this town covered an area of about 25 acres and was surrounded by a stone wall 2.30 m. thick. The line of the wall was traced on the ridge of the hill for a distance of more than a kilometer, and three projecting semicircular towers were discovered. Similar fortifications of this period have been excavated at Ai and at Jericho. They are not confined to Palestine but are a common feature in the architecture of the ancient Near East; we may deduce this fact from similar half-towers in the Early Dynastic levels at Uruk (Warka), in Mesopotamia, and from several drawings and carvings of the

Protodynastic period in Egypt. However, here for the first time in Palestine it is possible to lay bare the general plan of a city of this early period and its fortification.

Four different strata have been discovered in the city, and the wall is definitely connected with the second and third levels. The third stratum is remarkably rich in finds and the general plan of one of the quarters and its architecture has already begun to emerge. Though the buildings are of different dimensions and orientation, their plan is more or less identical. The typical building is a rectangular house, with the door in the center of one of the longer walls, steps leading down, doors hinged on the left, benches around the walls of the single room and a work table of stone near the middle. In one of these buildings a clay model of a house was found, painted with red stripes, thus making it possible to reconstruct the upper parts of the houses, which must have had flat roofs.

On the floors numerous objects were found, including, besides pottery, stone vessels, copper awls with bone handles, ornaments of bone, shell and ivory, and animal figurines of clay. Most welcome among the finds are jars of the class which has been found in the royal tombs of the First Dynasty at



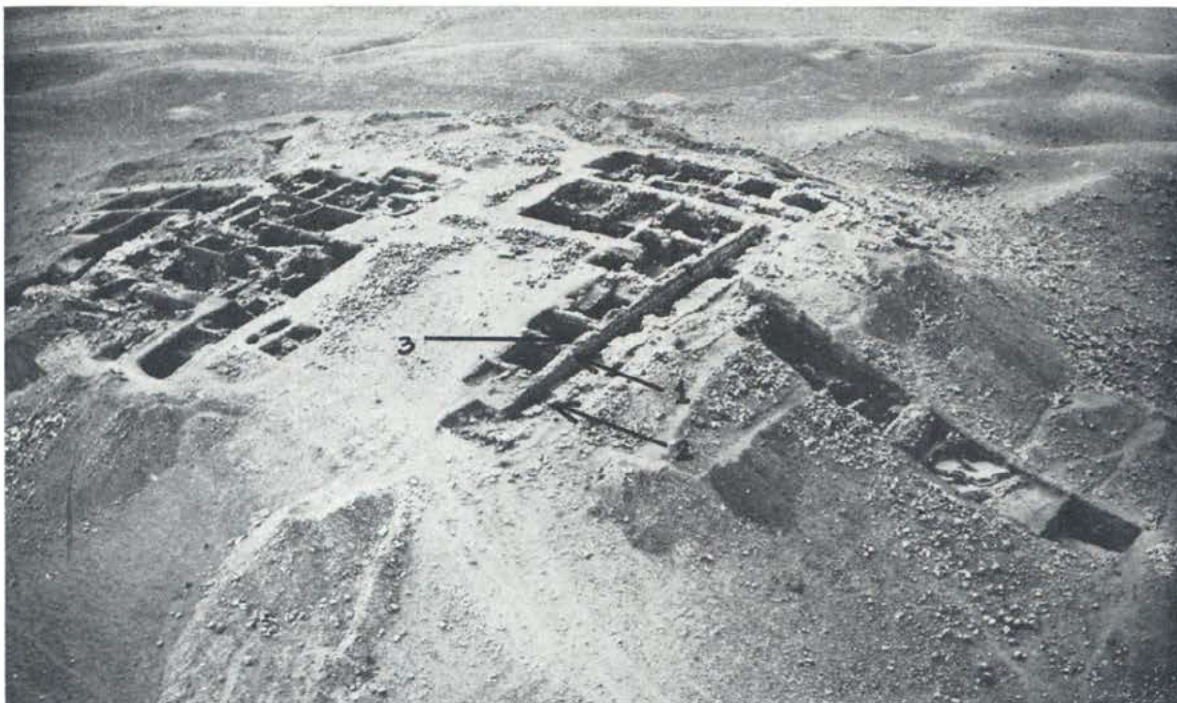
Pottery of the Early Bronze II period. The jar above was found in the second stratum and the jar below in the third stratum. Both types have been found in Egypt in First Dynasty context, hence are important for dating.



Clay model of an Early Bronze house.



A stone mortar with remains of grain. The size may be judged by the 10-cm. scale.



Air view of the citadel mound at the end of the first season: 1) Roman wall; 2) Israelite wall; 3) the area of the sanctuary, which was discovered at the end of the second season.

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Abydos and in other cemeteries in Egypt. Outstanding among them are jars decorated with a red painted herringbone design and triangles filled with dots, examples of which are known in Egypt from the late First Dynasty, thus establishing the date of this stratum with considerable accuracy. In the second stratum a common type is a beautifully burnished jar having ledge handles and also a pillar handle from rim to shoulder. Similar jars have been found in Egypt in a mid-First Dynasty context. These wares are termed by Egyptologists "foreign pottery" originating from Palestine or Syria, and it seems probable that Arad was one of the centers of their manufacture. Lumps of asphalt from the Dead Sea, which were found in many of the rooms, apparently also belong among the types of goods exported to Egypt. This product was in great demand there, and Arad dominated the main trade route between the Dead Sea region and Egypt.

Remains of grain and many granaries found in the city show the importance of agriculture in the economy of the town. The earlier of the two levels associated with the wall is full of large circular structures which

are probably foundations of large granaries. The problem of intensive agriculture in this now semi-arid area demands special attention and further research.

The ancient town was destroyed during Early Bronze Age II (not later than ca. 2700 B.C.) and most of it was never rebuilt. For this reason the remains were found only a few centimeters below the surface, which makes it unusually easy to uncover a town of this early period. Owing to its remarkable preservation, it promises to make a major contribution to our understanding of the early stages of urbanization in Palestine and the neighboring civilizations.

As there are no remains at Tell Arad from the later Canaanite period, there arises the question of the location of the Canaanite city mentioned in the Bible. There is hardly any doubt that Tell Arad is the site of Israelite Arad; this not only is borne out by the preservation of the name at the tell and the precise indication of Eusebius, but has been further strengthened by the discovery of the name Arad (*'rd*) inscribed on a bowl seven times in ancient Hebrew letters. This is one of the few instances in Palestine when an inscription with the name of the place being excavated has been found during the excavation, and it would be difficult to believe that the occurrence of

Ashlar masonry of the Israelite citadels.



(Above) Head of a terracotta figurine of the goddess Ashtoreth. Height ca. 4 cm.



(Left) Fragment of shell decorated with a lotus design, which may have been part of a cosmetic box. Photo: J. Schweig.

(Below) Iron Age jars and juglets after their restoration. The white part of the scale at lower left is 10 cm.





Fragments of a bowl which are inscribed seven times with the name 'rd (Arad), in reversed (negative) lettering. Photo: J. Schweig.



Hebrew seal inscribed *ldršybw bn '...* (belonging to Derashyahu son of '...).



One of the Aramaic ostraca.

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the name is accidental. But the question still is, Where must we look for the king of Arad and his city at the time of the Israelite conquest?

On the basis of the archaeological survey, the only major tell in this area which was inhabited during the later phases of the Canaanite period is Tell Malḥata (Tell el-Milh), some 12 km. southwest of Tell Arad. This is the only place which can be taken into consideration as the main stronghold in the area during the Late Bronze Age, but if it was Canaanite Arad, how can we explain the shift of the name in the Israelite period to another tell, 12 km. distant, while Tell Malḥata was still occupied? Fortunately the list of cities in the inscription of Shishak comes to our aid in solving this vexing problem. In it two citadels named Arad are mentioned, "Arad Rabat" (Arad the Great) and "Arad of the house (family) of Yeroḥam." The Shishak list proves, therefore, that in the period of Solomon there existed in this region two citadels called Arad, one the major fortress and the other inhabited by the Yeroḥam family, the name

of which is perhaps connected with biblical Jerahmeel and the "Negev of the Jerahmeelites" (I Sam. 27:10). It seems now that archaeology provides the explanation for this: apparently Solomon built two citadels in this area, one on the site of Canaanite Arad, then inhabited by the Yeroḥam family, and the other on the site of the Early Canaanite town to the north of it. He chose the latter for its strategic situation on the main road to the Wadi Araba and probably also because of its traditional rôle as a high place during the Early Israelite period. We shall return again to the last point.

FORTRESSES OF VARIOUS PERIODS were discovered on the citadel mound. These were destroyed and rebuilt about ten times between the time of Solomon and the Roman period.

To begin with the last mentioned, the Roman citadel was part of the early *limes* (border) fortification of the Roman empire on the edge of the desert before the overthrow of the Nabataean kingdom (A.D. 106). At the beginning of the Arab period this fortress was converted into a larger building, which was perhaps



The casemate wall, built during the later part of the eighth century B.C., on top of the sanctuary. This wall marks the destruction of the sanctuary.

partly used as a *khan* (inn) for travelers. In one of its rooms a treasure of glassware and other objects was discovered, which was hidden there when the place was abandoned.

During the Hellenistic period a solid tower was built, whose foundations have been preserved up to a height of 5-6 meters, and around it smaller rooms were built. At its foot a deep plaster-covered water pool was found.

The strongest and most imposing fortresses built at this site belong to the Israelite period. Some of them are built of ashlar masonry, an example of which has not hitherto been found in the Negev. From this it may be deduced that Arad was the main royal citadel in the area; it defended the borders of Judah and dominated the important road to the Araba, Edom and Elath. Remains of six Israelite citadels have been revealed, dating from Solomon to the end of the First Temple: one from the tenth century, two each from the ninth and eighth centuries and one from the end of the seventh century. The last two were surrounded by casemate walls with projecting towers. An imposing fortress of the eighth century, from approximately the time of Uzziah, was built partly of ashlar masonry, and the rich finds give evidence of its wealth. In the ninth century, perhaps during the reign of Jehoshaphat, the fortress was surrounded by a massive wall four meters thick, which may be classed among the strongest walls of this period known in Palestine. The excavation of the fortress of the level which probably dates to the days of Solomon is still in an early stage, and its plan is not yet defined. However, it is already evident that this was the earliest citadel, built on top

of an artificial filling. Below this, traces of a settlement were found, with some silos and remnants of houses. This settlement, which belongs to the beginning of the tenth century B.C., was apparently an unfortified village and was erected immediately on top of remains of the Early Bronze Age.

The abundance of pottery found indicates that those who lived in the citadel were not only soldiers but also merchants and artisans. Hundreds of vessels were found on the successive floors of the citadel's rooms and its court. It is obvious that the place was subjected to a number of sudden conquests and that its inhabitants were unable to save many of their possessions. In the courtyard of the citadel were several industrial installations, some of them probably connected with metal working and perfume distilling. Some weights found, a *pim* and several inscribed 1, 2, 4 or 8 shekels, point to commercial activities. Worthy of mention are cult and art objects such as Ashtoreth figurines, a Hebrew seal and a decorated shell which probably served as a cosmetic palette. The precise stratification provided by Arad and the wealth of pottery from the different strata will be the basis for a more definite chronology of Judah in the Iron Age.

A fact of great importance is the abundance of written material preserved because of the aridity of the climate. The inscriptions, written in ink on potsherds (*ostraca*), are partly in ancient Hebrew-Phoenician letters, from the Israelite strata, and partly in Aramaic script, from the Persian period. Most of them are fragments of dockets and business documents; some are letters. In one letter parts of fifteen lines have been preserved. Found in a level of about



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the time of Hezekiah, it is the most ancient Hebrew letter hitherto discovered. Unfortunately it is incomplete, although several names and many words are readable. Some of the best preserved ostraca belong to the fourth century B.C.; these contain lists of names and goods. The script is identical with that on the ostraca discovered at Ezion Geber, and this points again to the connections between the two places.

This rich epigraphic material needs thorough study before any conclusions are possible. However, since here for the first time a series of ostraca extending from the ninth to the fourth century has been discovered at one site, the material makes an important contribution to establishing the chronology of Hebrew palaeography.

THE HIGHLIGHT OF THE DISCOVERIES in the Israelite citadels was a sanctuary, which was uncovered on the last days of the second season. Thus far only part of the Holy of Holies has been excavated. Three steps led to its entrance, which was flanked by two stone altars, the larger of which is 51 cm. high. The altars are beautifully dressed and smoothed, and in concave depressions in their upper surfaces were found the remains of some organic material, apparently burnt offerings. In the entrance, between the altars, was a gutter sloping from right to left. In the room itself was a raised platform (*bama*) of stone and around it stood three stelae (*mašebot*). The largest of these is well cut and smoothed and on its face are traces of red color.

Although the excavation of the sanctuary is just beginning, some vital facts already emerge quite clearly. This is not a small shrine or high place, but a well constructed building of large dimensions. Judging from the walls uncovered to date, it seems that the sanctuary included three adjoining rooms, the entrance facing east and the Holy of Holies to the west. This is exactly the principle of the plan of the Solomonic Temple in Jerusalem, according to its description in the Bible. Since the sanctuary is within the area of the royal citadel at Arad, there is hardly any doubt that this is a royal Israelite sanctuary, the first one discovered through scientific excavation.

The sanctuary existed during the ninth and the first half of the eighth century and was repaired several times. We have not yet penetrated to the earlier levels in this area, and only next season shall we

know if it was built in the tenth century, which seems very likely. However, its final stage is already clear: a casemate wall which cuts through the rooms of the sanctuary dates its destruction to sometime in the second half of the eighth century. It is probable that the destruction is to be associated with the joint Aramaean-Israelite-Edomite attack on Judah in the days of Ahaz, in 734 B.C. (cf. II Kings 16:6; II Chron. 28:17), and that the fortress above, surrounded by the casemate wall, was built by Hezekiah. It is interesting that Hezekiah is the first king of Judah about whom we are told that "he removed the high places and brake the images (*mašebot*)" (II Kings 18:4, 22), while even a virtuous king like Jehoshaphat did not interfere with the worship in the high places (I Kings 22:43).

The discovery of the Israelite sanctuary raises many problems and questions which cannot be dealt with here and which must wait for the more complete excavation of this unique building. However, a royal sanctuary could hardly have been built here without an earlier tradition. We have in the Bible an interesting passage stating that the Kenite Hobab family, related to Moses, settled down in the vicinity of Arad (Septuagint version of Judg. 1:16). We owe to Professor Mazar the ingenious suggestion that the biblical emphasis on this special family and its relation to Moses hints at its important role in connection with Yahwistic worship at various places. This idea may become most fruitful for the solution of some problems of early Israelite history and religion, and it makes the role of Arad in the Israelite period more understandable. The prominent hill of Tell Arad was probably chosen by the Hobab family as their central place of worship in the region of Arad. This is probably a further reason why Solomon chose this place for his main fortress in the area, giving it the name of Arad Rabat. The traditional high place was converted into a sanctuary within the royal citadel, using the honored Kenite priests who traced their genealogy to Moses. The sanctuary is, of course, an important part of the royal citadel, which was the administrative and military center in this border region. Exactly the same motives apparently guided Jeroboam in the construction of his two main royal sanctuaries at Beth-el and Dan, both on the border of the kingdom and both venerated through ancient traditions.

Some of our conclusions are of course hypothetical, and we are waiting with eagerness for their verification or alteration in the next season, planned for this summer. It is already clear, however, that Tell Arad is one of the most interesting and promising sites in southern Israel.

(Opposite page) Holy of Holies of Israelite sanctuary, with altar at each side of entrance. Photo: J. Schweig.