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In Memoriam: Yohanan Aharoni

Author(s): Anson F. Rainey

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IN MEMORIAM

YOHANAN AHARONI

Yohanah Aharoni was born in Germany, June 7, 1919, and immigrated to Palestine in 1933. He was a founding member of Kibbutz Allonim beside the Jezreel Valley, where he lived until 1947. From 1948 to 1950 he served in the Israel Defense Forces. He began his public archeological career as Antiquities Inspector for Galilee, representing the Department of Antiquities of the newly founded State of Israel. He continued in this capacity during 1950-55 and a survey that he conducted during those years culminated in his doctoral dissertation on *The Settlement of the Israelite Tribes in Upper Galilee* (published in Hebrew, Jerusalem, 1957). For four years he was staff archeologist on the Hazor Expedition as supervisor of Area A, where he uncovered the casemate wall and gate of the Solomonic period and was the first to date them correctly. In 1959 he became a research fellow at the Hebrew University and rose to the rank of associate professor (1966). His principal archeological activities during those years included the excavations at Ramat Rahel, Arad and Lachish (the temple area). Notable among the many fruits of those labors were the rich material finds, including architectural decorations, of the royal Judean palace at Ramat Rahel, the collection of cult vessels and the incense altar in a cult room at Lachish, and the temple and inscriptions of Arad.

In 1968 Aharoni came to Tel Aviv University with the rank of full professor and chairman of the Department of Archeology and Ancient Near Eastern Cultures. He reorganized the department along regional lines with majors in: Eretz-Israel and Syria, Mesopotamia, Anatolia, Egypt and also Prehistory. He also organized the Institute of Archeology as a research body including laboratories (and liaison with other science labs in the university) and departments for the various activities of research and processing to serve the projects of the academic staff.

In 1969 he launched the Beer-sheba Negev Excavations as a continuing phase of his previous Negev

survey and his excavations at Arad. Two other sites, Tel Malhata and Tel Masos, were also excavated concurrently, using the same base camp at Beer-sheba.

To students of the Bible, Aharoni is probably best known for his *Land of the Bible* (London and Philadelphia, 1967), and the *MacMillan Bible Atlas* (with M. Avi-Yonah; New York, 1968), textbooks thoroughly grounded in the written texts and the terrain of Israel. Before his death, he had completed the notes for a revision of both works. In these books and his many articles, Aharoni showed his devotion to the original sources and his ability to grasp the real life situations of antiquity.

As a philologist, Aharoni has recently demonstrated his talents in the publication of the *Arad Inscriptions* (Jerusalem, 1975), for which he received the Ben-Zvi Prize. His translations are simple, straightforward and reflect the sound common sense of his interpretations. An English translation is now in preparation (the book also contains a chapter by J. Naveh on the Aramaic texts from Arad).

Common sense was also the dominant feature in his approach to excavation. His use of sectional drawings can be illustrated from the Arad field books, dating back to 1962. But method was always adapted to the problems at hand and the basic goal was never forgotten: to elucidate *the way of life* on the site. Stratigraphy, including the differentiation of soil types, etc., was followed carefully, but even stratigraphy was never made an end in itself. Thus we have been enriched by an Israelite temple, a royal Judean fortress and a store city with its principal structures, store houses, apartments, etc.

By his colleagues, Aharoni will be remembered as Yohanah, the quiet, unassuming, thoughtful scholar and friend, patient with his students and straightforward with all his associates. He had the courage to make decisions and carry them through and was unafraid to stand alone, even when the "establishment" was unable to digest the new implications of evidence he had uncovered. He had a simple faith that the facts would eventually find acceptance. Above all, he had what Rollo May has called "the courage of imperfection." He never hesitated to abandon a previous view in the light of new evidence, a sure sign of an integrated and secure personality.

On February 10, 1976, the career of this pioneer spirit was abruptly halted, just when he was reaching his stride in scholarly creativity and dynamic research. They say the Righteous in Gan-Eden spend their time studying Torah, but I can't feature Yohanah sitting down all the time. Instead I envision him with his newly acquired Torah under his arm, setting out to survey the new terrain!

ANSON F. RAINEY, TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY

