 CHAPTER FIVE

ARCHAEOLOGY AND TEXTS IN THE PERSIAN PERIOD:
FOCUS ON SANBALLAT

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The historiography of Palestine in the first millennium BCE is tradition-ally based on three pillars: ancient literary traditions, archaeological excavations and epigraphy. The texts belonging to the ancient literary traditions, like biblical texts and the works of Greek and Latin historians, have a special position: they may furnish the initial key to understanding the archaeological site and may, more or less, illuminate its identification and chronology.

This role of ancient literary texts is well illustrated, for example, by the New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land.\(^2\) The introductory paragraphs of some of its entries contain the evidence of ancient literary texts. The evidence of these texts is situated in the introductory portions, while the description of different strata and discoveries is placed after the literary evidence.\(^3\) We can observe that, in some sense, the literary tradition precedes the archaeology in these cases.

In this article, we emphasize the importance and real interpretive force of another source: the secondary literature. The interpretive force of secondary literature can influence the understanding of primary sources very strongly; it concerns all three mentioned pillars of ancient historiography. It may considerably influence our understanding of ancient literary sources, epigraphic finds and archaeological discoveries as well. We illustrate this interpretive force of secondary literature

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\(^2\) NEAEHL, 4 vols, 1993; 2008.

\(^3\) For example, the entries in Stern 1993: “Abila” (vol. 1, 1–3); “Arad” (vol. 1, 75–87); “Arbel” (vol. 1, 87–89); “Aroer (in Moab)” (vol. 1, 92–93); “Ashdod” (vol. 1, 94–102); “Ashkelon” (vol. 1, 103–112); etc.
by the example of the discussion concerning the Samaria papyri from Wadi Daliyeh, and Sanballat, governor of Samaria.

1. Before the Samaria Papyri: One or Two Sanballats?

Historians have long struggled to answer the question of the number of Sanballats. Within the history of this discussion we are able to distinguish two main periods: before and after the discovery of the Samaria papyri.

Before the discovery, the name of Sanballat was known from three sources: the book of Nehemiah, a single letter from Elephantine, and in the *Jewish Antiquities* of Flavius Josephus. First of all, Sanballat is attested in the book of Nehemiah. In this text he is called “Sanballat the Horonite” (סנבלט החרני). His official function in the administration of Samaria is not indicated. This Sanballat is associated with Tobiah, the Ammonite official and with Geshem the Arab, against Nehemiah, governor of Judea. According to Neh 13:28, one of the sons of Joiada, son of Eliashib, the high priest of the Jerusalem temple, was the son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite.

The name and title “Sanballat, governor of Samaria” appears in the Aramaic letter *TADAE* A4.7:29, discovered at Elephantine. This letter, dated to 25 November, 407 BCE, was addressed by Jedaniah and his colleagues from the fortress of Elephantine to Bagohi/Bagavahia, governor of Judah, and concerned a request for help in the reconstruction of the temple of Yhw. In the letter, its authors also refer to another letter previously sent on the same matter to Jehohanan, the high priest and his colleagues in Jerusalem, as well as to Ostanes. At the end, the authors mention that a similar letter had also been sent to Delaiaiah and Shelemiah, sons of Sanballat, governor of Samaria (סנבלט פחת). This sentence appears to indicate that Sanballat was still officially functioning as the governor of Samaria about 407 BCE, his two sons perhaps taking over some part of his responsibilities. This observation seems confirmed by the letter *TADAE* A4.9, written probably within the last years of the fifth century and after 407 BCE. This text is a memorandum, containing permission by Bagohi/Bagavahya and

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*Neh 2:10, 19; 3:33; 4:1; 6:1, 2, 5, 12, 14; 13:28.*
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