AN INSCRIBED BULLA WITH GRAZING DOE FROM TEL ‘ETON

Avraham Faust and Esther Eshel

Bar-Ilan University

1. Introduction

In the 2008 excavation season at Tel ‘Eton an inscribed bulla was found inside an eighth century BCE building. The following article will briefly present the bulla within its archaeological context, and will discuss its significance.

Tel ‘Eton, usually identified with biblical ‘Eglon, is located in the trough valley, on the southeastern part of the Judean Shephelah, just below the Hebron hills. The site covers about fifteen acres, and is located some eleven km east-southeast of Tel Lachish. The ancient city is situated near an important junction between the north-south road that meandered along the trough valley connecting the Beersheba valley and the Ayalon valley, and the east-west road that connected the coastal plain and the Shephelah with Hebron, and which passed along Wadi Adoraim. The site’s location near large valleys also secured its proximity to fertile soils, increasing its economic importance.

Small-scale salvage excavations on the tel were carried out in 1977 by the Lachish expedition, headed by D. Ussishkin. A group of archaeologists from the Lachish expedition, led by E. Ayalon and R. Bar-Natan, conducted salvage excavations not far from the top of the tel, where a robber trench had been cut into the mound. Only four squares were opened, and despite the shallowness of the excavations, two well-preserved Iron II strata were identified. In addition, a number of tombs, part of the large necropolis that surrounded the site, were excavated in the past.

In 2006 the Bar Ilan University expedition initiated a large-scale excavations project at the tel and a survey of its surroundings. A meticulous survey on the tel preceded the excavations, and was followed by shovel tests. Later, three excavation areas were opened on the tel (Fig. 1).

---


4 The excavations (permit numbers G45/2006, G69/2007, G47/2008) and the survey (permits numbers G45/2006, G15/2007, S28/2008) were directed by Avraham Faust, and the expedition staff included Samy Maman (administration), Haya Katz (field director and ceramic analysis), Daniel Master (assistance in directing the dig and survey, 2006), Tehila Atkins (supervising area C), George Pierce (surveying, 2006), Josh Walton (supervising area A, 2006), Aharon Greener (supervising area A, 2007), Garth Gilmour (supervising area A, 2008), Einat Ambar-Armon (assisting in supervising area A, 2006), Naveh Yogev (assisting in supervising area A, 2007), Holly Aller (assisting
Area A, in which the bulla was found, is located on the highest part of the tel, and we shall now briefly describe the result of the excavations in this area and the archaeological context of the finds (Fig. 2).

2. The Excavations at Area A

Three levels of occupations were exposed during the first three seasons of excavations at this area.

1. The upper stratum included remains of a massive, square and symmetrical building (approx. 20 x 20 m), which appears to have had double outer walls that were probably filled with stones. The structure was divided by walls into several internal spaces. The size of the building, its massiveness, and its location at the highest part of the tel in a position that enabled observation over large areas, seems to hint that the structure served military purposes, probably a fort of some kind. Unfortunately, the massive structure was preserved only to a height of one course, and only the foundations, below the floors, were excavated. Consequently, we cannot yet date the building.

2. During the 2008 excavation season we unearthed limited evidence for reoccupation on top of this massive eighth century BCE destruction layer (below). The pottery associated with this activity is similar to that found within the destruction layer, and hence we think that the reoccupation took place immediately after the destruction.

3. Below the fort (and the reoccupation phase) we unearthed parts of well-preserved buildings whose walls were still standing to a height of more than 1.5 m., sealed under a massive wall-fall that included stones, bricks, and many other finds (e.g., arrowheads and additional metal artifacts, loom-weights, etc.). It seems that the buildings were destroyed in the late eighth century BCE, perhaps during Sennacherib’s 701 BCE campaign (Fig. 3). The main building, whose corner stones were nicely carved, was quite large and its area (ground floor only) can be roughly estimated as some 250 sq.m. So far we have uncovered much of the central courtyard, whose floor was made of plaster, and parts of the rooms that surrounded it to the north, west and south. During the last phase of the occupation of the building the courtyard was divided into two halves by a flimsy wall. It seems that the rest of the building was roofed, and a second floor was built above it. One of the rooms was excavated in its entirety, and the finds on the floor included many smashed storage jars, unearthed in situ, and between them were additional finds including a few juglets, animal horns (the bones), metal artifacts, and more; many of the

in supervising area A, 2008), Philip Johnson (assisting in supervising area B, 2006), Ortal Chalaf (assisting in supervising area B, 2007 and surveying, 2008), Masha Levin (assisting in supervising area B, 2008), Mechael Azaband (supervising area C, 2007), Silvie Neuman (surveyor, 2007), Rotem Shelef (registrar, 2006), and Pirchia Eyal (registrar, 2007, and laboratory coordinator). Restoration was done by Dina Castel, and conservation by Yishaiau Ben-Yaakov. The archeobotanical analysis in the field was carried out by Ehud Weiss, with the assistance of Anat Hartman and Tael Mahler-Slaski.

The excavations were carried out with the help students from Bar-Ilan University, Wheaton College and the Open University of Israel, as well as by youth from the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel trailblazers. The expedition was greatly assisted by the Lachish Regional Council. We would especially like to thank Mr. Danni Moravia, the mayor, as well as to his assistant, Mr. Meir Dahan, the council’s Security Officer Yaron Meshulam and the director of the transportation department, Mr. Avi Cohen. This help, along with the assistance we received from the people living in the region (and especially those in Moshav Shekef, notably Gadi Eilon and Eitan Rosenblat) was invaluable and helped the expedition in achieving its goals.