



## **TAANACH** (Heb. ta<sup>ʿ</sup>anak)

**Location:** T. is situated in the southern corner of the Jezreel valley on one of the foothills of the samarian hill country. The identification of T. and modern Tell Ta<sup>ʿ</sup>annek/Ti<sup>ʿ</sup>innik is undisputed because of the continuity in the name and because of its location on the southern branch of the Via Maris, next to the pass of Megiddo.

T. is 8 km SE from Megiddo and ca. 40 km from the coast. The pear-shaped mound measures 340 m from north to south, and up to 140 m from east to west. It rises ca. 40 m above the surrounding plain and 180 m above sea level.

**Sources:** T. is mentioned in the account of the Battle of Megiddo by Pharaoh Thutmose III, ca. 1468 B.C., as a southern bypass to Megiddo and as a place where Egyptian troops were mustered; and in the Palestine List in the Amun temple at Karnak. T. is probably mentioned in EA 248:14, in which its prince Yašdata had fled to Megiddo because of a conflict with Shechem. Pharaoh Shishaq mentions T. as one of the Israelite cities he destroyed in his campaign of ca. 918 B.C. In the OT, T. is mentioned as the town of a Canaanite king Israel could not conquer (Jud 1:27; Jos 17:11f.), although its king is mentioned as one of the 31 kings defeated by Joshua (Jos 12:21). The city was (theoretically) assigned to Issachar and Asher, and later to Manasseh. T. came under Israelite control at the time of Solomon and became one of his administrative centers (1 Kg 4:12). Subsequently, T. is mentioned in the Byzantine period by Jerome in his Onomastikon (98:12; 100;7) as a *villa pergrandis*, i.e. a large village. There are several remarks about the village and a monastery from Crusader period and in the Ottoman census from 1596. In the 19th century Victor Guérin visited T.. He recorded the visible remains and suggested that the present-day mosque had the walls of a Byzantine church as its foundation.

**Excavations:** T. was first excavated by Ernst Sellin, who was then at Vienna, Austria, in three campaigns 1902-1904. S. was assisted by G. Schumacher, who later worked in Megiddo, and by the Assyriologist F. Hrozný, who edited the cuneiform texts. This was one of the first excavations in Palestine (starting in the same year as Macalister at Gezer) and the first in the north of Israel. Excavation techniques and

recording systems were still in their infancy. But S. was a keen observer and careful in his conclusions. E.g. he was very reluctant to interpret the many child-burials as remains of child-sacrifices. Besides the small cuneiform archive, the most important findings were fragments of at least two cult-stands (one reconstructable), and the bronze figurine of a goddess (standing; 15 cm high) of Hurrian type. S. emphasized the traces of influence from Cyprus (later to be identified as Mycenaean) during the Canaanite period (ca. 1400 B.C.).

In 1963, 1966, and 1968 Paul W. Lapp conducted excavations on behalf of ASOR and the Graduate School of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. Work was mainly done in the W and SW of the tell. Many points of Sellin's work were clarified and elaborated. It could be shown, that the town was protected by city walls in all major periods. The now available ceramic chronology allowed the excavators to differentiate between the several phases of the Bronze Age city and to identify a gap in occupation of about half a millennium between EB II and III and MB II (down to ca. 1700 B.C.). The beginning of EB II at T. was dated to around 2700 B.C. The LB and Iron-Age phases also could be clarified. Another cult stand was found, dated to the 10th cent., as well as two more cuneiform tablets, one (TT 950) dating to ca. 1450, the other (TT 433 = KTU 4.767; in alphabetic cuneiform script) to ca. 1200.

**History:** The oldest archaeological evidence shows T. as a prestigious center of the Early Bronze Age (EB II + III, ca. 2700-2300 B.C.). There was a city wall, which was 4.20 m thick and still preserved to a height of 4 m. Several towers were related to this first wall. In later phases retaining walls and a large glacis were added. This early glacis may be an indigenous development. After a gap of over half a millennium a campsite developed at T., and then T. revived as a an impressive Middle Bronze Age city and later as a smaller Late Bronze Age Town (MB II - LB II; ca. 1700 - 1350 B.C.). There was extensive building activity: Sellin's 'Westburg' was redated to this period (ca. 1600); a chamber with steps descending 10 m into bedrock may be an abandoned effort to reach a spring. During these MB and LB periods T. was an active city with far-reaching trade relations, as is shown e.g. by the evidence of Mycenaean pottery, but it was always in a state of dependence on the still larger Megiddo. The personal names in the letters and the

lists (ca. 60 % Semitic, the rest Hurrite, Hittite and Indo-Aryan) show a mixed population. Just as Megiddo did, so too did T. side with the Syrian powers against Egypt and was consequently seriously affected by the victory of Thutmosis III in the battle of Megiddo, 1468 B.C.. Besides its basic continuity, its culture and population declined during the LB. The archive from ca. 1450 mentions the Egyptian governor at Gaza and shows the Egyptian dominance also in the local affairs of the Jezreel valley. In the Amarna period (ca. 1350) T. was affected by the local conflict between Megiddo and Shechem.

During the 12th cent. T. seems to have suffered two (at least partial) destructions. After a period of reduced population the town grew larger again in the 10th cent. The cult-stands found by Sellin and Lapp belong to this period. T. was now under the domination of the newly formed Israelite state. A large building found by Sellin seems to have been the residence of the Israelite governor (cf. 1 Kg 4,12). The town was destroyed by Pharaoh Shishaq ca. 918 B.C., but it recovered under the Omrides in the 9th cent.. The so called NE-outwork belongs to the extensive building activities of Omri and Ahab in the northern kingdom (Nigro, 1994).

T. may have suffered as a consequence of the Aramean wars in the late 9th cent. and of the Assyrian war in 733 B.C.. The final destruction around 600 B.C. (Sellin) may have been caused by the Egyptians (Pharaoh Necho) or by the Babylonians. In Hellenistic and roman times the village was not on the tell itself, but beside it to the east. In the Byzantine period it grew quite large (cf. Jerome).

In Abassid times (10th-11th cent.) T. was a large country town, both an important site at the crossroads and a rural center. There was an elaborate palace on top of the tell. This presumably was destroyed by the Crusaders, as T. was situated between their centers Akko and Besan (BethShean).

***The Texts:*** Sellin found 12 texts in and around a ceramic box. Though small in number, it may be called an archive. It is the first - and to date (1996) still the only - cuneiform archive found in Palestine/Israel. To the seven tablets and five fragments (TT.T1-12) the tablet TT 950, found in 1968, may be added. There are four letters (ca. 100 readable lines) and nine name-lists (ca. 80 personal names, reflecting some ethnic variety). Recent study has shown, that Hrozný's transcriptions and translation were more reliable than Albright's (Glock 1983); however, the name of

the local prince presumably is to be read Talwashur, not Ishtarwashur (Glock 1983; Görg 1988). The letters bear witness to the domination of the Egyptian governor (named Amanhatpa), who resided at Gaza and visited Megiddo. Evidently, the Akkadian language and script were used not only for international diplomacy as in the Amarna letters, but also for local and even private affairs in the region. Renewed study of the letters would contribute to the picture of Canaan in the LB age.

**Bibliography:** *Ernst Sellin*, Tell Ta<sup>c</sup>annek, Vienna 1904 (with: *Friedrich Hrozný*, Keilschrifttexte aus Ta<sup>c</sup>annek; Nr. 1-4).

*Ernst Sellin*, Eine Nachlese auf dem Tell Ta<sup>c</sup>annek, Vienna 1906 (with: *Friedrich Hrozný*, Die neugefundenen Keilschrifttexte von Ta<sup>c</sup>annek; Nr. 5-12).

*Paul W. Lapp*, The 1963 excavation at Tell Ta<sup>c</sup>annek, BASOR 173 (1964), 4-44.

*Paul W. Lapp*, The 1966 excavation at Tell Ta<sup>c</sup>annek, BASOR 185 (1967), 2-39.

*Paul W. Lapp*, The 1968 excavation at Tell Ta<sup>c</sup>annek, BASOR 195 (1969), 2-39.

*Walter E. Rast*, Taanach I: Studies in the Iron Age Pottery, Cambridge MA. 1978.

*Albert E. Glock*, Texts and Archeology at Tell Ta<sup>c</sup>annek, Berytus 31 (1983), 57-66.

*Manfred Görg*, Zum Namen des Fürsten von Taanach. BN 41 (1988) 15-18.

*Albert E. Glock*, Taanach, ABD IV, 1992, 287-291 (Lit.).

*Albert E. Glock*, Taanach, NEAEHL IV, 1993, 1428-1433 (Lit.).

*Lorenzo Nigro*, The 'Nordostburg' at Tell Ta<sup>c</sup>annek..., ZDPV 110 (1994), 168-180;

*Siegfried Kreuzer*, Palaestinaarchaeologie aus Oesterreich. Ernst Sellins Ausgrabungen auf dem Tell Ta<sup>c</sup>annek in Israel (1902-1904), in: Beiträege zur Geschichte der Evangelisch-Theologischen Fakultät in Wien 1821-1996 (ed. K. Schwarz / F. Wagner), Vienna 1997, 257-276.

Siegfried Kreuzer

© This is the preprint-version of the Article "Taanak" in: Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids MI / Cambridge U.K. 2000, 1268-69.