

A Researcher's Guide to the Lachish Collection in the British Museum

Pamela Magrill

This book is dedicated to the memory of Olga Tufnell

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Preface and Acknowledgements

In 1980 the Department of Western Asiatic Antiquities (now the Department of the Ancient Near East), British Museum, acquired from the Institute of Archaeology, University of London, a collection of over 17,000 objects from the 1930s British excavations at Lachish. Also included were the original site records, excavation photographs and other archive material. During most of the 1990s the author, then curator of the Lachish collection, was engaged in a project to sort, research and catalogue the artefacts onto the British Museum's collections database. The project was completed at the end of 2000 and from the resulting information it has been possible to compile a handlist of the entire collection which forms the main body of this Guide. The principal aim of the handlist is to make these objects more widely known and more readily accessible to interested researchers. However, at the same time, the

opportunity has been taken to correct errors in the original excavation report, present new information about some objects which had been previously published, and list for the first time the substantial amount of unpublished material from the site in the British Museum.

This book would not have been possible without the continued support and co-operation of the Department of the Ancient Near East, British Museum. In particular thanks go to the Keeper, John Curtis for his continued interest in the project and to the former Deputy Keeper, Christopher Walker for much practical and logistical help over the years. I am also grateful to Josephine Turquet of British Museum Press for all her hard work in bringing a complicated manuscript to press, and to my husband, David Symons, for unending help, support and advice throughout.

Introduction

The Excavations

Lachish (Tell ed-Duweir) is a large, multi-period tell site in Israel, located approximately 40km south-west of Jerusalem, with remains dating from the Neolithic period onwards. It is an important site in the history of the region. In the Late Bronze Age, it was one of the Canaanite city-states known from the Amarna letters. In the Iron Age, it was the second city of Judah, known from Biblical texts and Assyrian records. In 701 BC it was besieged and conquered by the Assyrians, an event graphically depicted in a series of reliefs from Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh, now on display in the British Museum.

The first major excavations at the site were carried out between 1932–1938 by the Wellcome-Marston Archaeological Research Expedition to the Near East, a British team led by James Leslie Starkey and largely funded by Sir Henry Wellcome.¹ Other key members of the expedition included G. Lankester Harding, C.H. Inge, R. Richmond Brown and Olga Tufnell. Starkey and most of the members of his staff received their archaeological training with Sir Flinders Petrie, working first in Egypt and later in southern Palestine, and Petrie's influence is apparent in many aspects of their methodology and record-keeping. Starkey was tragically murdered in January 1938 on his way from Lachish to the opening of the new Palestine Archaeological Museum (now the Rockefeller Museum) in Jerusalem. The rest of the team remained in the field to complete the 1937–38 season but after that excavations came to an end.² The monumental task of overseeing the preparation of volumes II–IV of the final report was undertaken by Olga Tufnell,³ who did much of the research and writing herself. These books duly appeared between 1940–1958.

The British excavations were carried out on a grand scale by today's standards. Typically, the expedition spent up to six months in the field each season, usually from October/November to the following April/May, and employed a large local workforce. Starkey initially planned to clear areas around the base of the mound to use as the location for spoil dumps from excavations on the tell itself. This led to the discovery of extensive cemeteries⁴ with remains dating mainly from the Early Bronze, Middle Bronze, Late Bronze and Iron Ages but with smaller amounts of earlier and later material. These areas around the base of the mound became the focus of much of the expedition's efforts over the six years of work. Excavations were also carried out on a ridge to the north-west of the mound, where the earliest occupation at the site⁵ was discovered in Area 1500 (the North-West Settlement) and an Early Bronze Age IV⁶ cemetery (Area 2000) also came to light. On the tell itself the team dug two deep soundings (the North-East Section and the West Section) and investigated the Iron Age fortifications and city gate, where an important group of Hebrew ostraca known as the Lachish Letters was discovered. On the summit they uncovered various rooms, structures and buildings, mostly of

Iron Age or later date, such as the Residency, the Palace-Fort, the Solar Shrine and the Great Shaft. A Late Bronze Age temple, known as the Fosse Temple from its location in a section of the abandoned Middle Bronze Age defensive ditch or fosse, was excavated on the north-west slopes of the mound.

The Finds: the divisions

At the end of each season of excavation there was an official division of finds between the Department of Antiquities of the Palestine Mandate government and the excavators. The objects chosen each year by the Department of Antiquities remained in Jerusalem and were accessioned into the then Palestine Archaeological Museum. Lists of these objects, along with their Museum numbers, were subsequently published as appendices in volumes II, III and IV of the British report.⁷ The artefacts retained by the Mandate government in the 1930s are still in Jerusalem today and now form part of the 'pre-1948' collections of the Israel Antiquities Authority.

Those objects included in the British allocation were shipped to London after the annual division of finds had been agreed. They were housed initially in one of the large exhibition galleries at the Wellcome Research Institute on the Euston Road, where the expedition had its London base. However, towards the end of 1936 it became necessary for Starkey and his team to find new premises in London.⁸ In October 1936 Starkey approached Mortimer Wheeler, the director of the newly created Institute of Archaeology, University of London, about 'temporary accommodation' at the Institute's building in Regents Park. Wheeler agreed and the Institute of Archaeology, first in Regents Park and later in Gordon Square, became the home of the Wellcome-Marston expedition for over two decades.

The Finds: post-excavation history and subsequent distributions

The post-excavation history of the finds allocated to the British team is long and complex. In the first season of excavations (1932–33) a substantial financial contribution was made to the expedition by H. Dunscombe Colt, a wealthy American archaeologist who also participated in the field. As a result, Colt received part of the British share of the finds for that season and this material was taken by him to the United States in 1933. Colt's involvement in the Lachish excavations was short-lived and did not continue beyond the first season.⁹ In 1934 Colt presented a portion of his share of the Lachish finds to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.¹⁰ The remainder went to New York University in 1940,¹¹ and was subsequently sold to the Jewish Museum, New York in 1973.¹²

During the 1940s, a collection of physical anthropology specimens (including over 700 crania) and animal bones from the Lachish excavations was deposited in the British Museum (Natural History), London, now known as the Natural History

Museum. They are currently in the collections of the Palaeontology and Zoology Departments at that institution.

Also in the 1940s, while she was employed by the Wellcome Trustees to oversee the preparation of the Lachish excavation report, Olga Tufnell began to receive occasional requests from various sources for duplicate objects. One such request came in 1943 from a Housemaster at Eton College and, with the approval of the Secretary to the Wellcome Trustees, a selection of approximately 40-50 objects was sent there in October of that year. Another request came in 1947 from the schoolmaster at the Preparatory Boy's School in Matlock (Derbyshire): Tufnell records in her monthly 'Progress Report' to the Wellcome Trustees for March 1st 1947 that she 'sent some unwanted pots and small objects to the school museum on behalf of the Trustees'. A collection of objects was also sent to the University of Sydney at the request of Mr. James R. Stewart in 1949.

By mid-1951 there was a real possibility that the expedition might have to give up its rooms at the Institute early in the following year.¹³ Concerned, Olga Tufnell wrote in her 'Progress Report' to the Trustees for August-September 1951, 'We should, therefore, consider taking active measures for the dispersal of the duplicate collection.' As a result, a number of distributions were made in 1952 and then again in 1956.¹⁴ During those years material was presented to the following institutions both in the UK and abroad:

University of Bergen (1956);
Musées Royaux, Brussels (1956);
Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery (1956);
Institute of Oriental Studies, University of Cambridge (1952, 1956);
Trinity College, Dublin (1952, 1956);
University of Durham (1956);
Department of Semitics, University of Leeds (1952, 1956);
City of Liverpool Public Museums (1956);
British Museum, London (1956);¹⁵
Wellcome Historical Medical Museum, London (1956);
Lucknow Museum, Lucknow (1952);
University of Manchester (1956);
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (1956);
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (1956);
Musée du Louvre, Paris (1956);
University of Sydney (1952, 1956).

Also in 1956, the largest share of the collection was formally presented to the Institute of Archaeology, University of London along with the excavation photographs, site records and other archives. However, the story does not end there. Probably in about 1960 a small group of Lachish objects from the University of Leeds collection was sent on long-term loan to the University of Melbourne where it currently remains.¹⁶ In 1980, as part of a drive to cut costs and save on storage space the Wellcome Trust rationalized its collections and distributed material to a number of museums in Britain. The Lachish objects originally given to the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum in 1956 were transferred to the University of Manchester at this time. It was also in 1980, as already mentioned above in the preface, that the large collection of Lachish material held by the Institute of Archaeology was acquired by the British Museum.

As a result of the original divisions and subsequent distributions described above, artefacts from the 1930s Lachish

excavations are now to be found around the world in at least 20 institutions on four continents. While lists were published of the material retained in Jerusalem in the 1930s by the Palestine Department of Antiquities,¹⁷ the same was not done for the objects from the British allocation presented to various institutions in the 1940s and 1950s. It is hoped that eventually all the collections concerned will be able to make their Lachish holdings more widely known. However, for the present, in an attempt to provide at least some assistance to researchers who wish to locate particular Lachish objects not in the British Museum, Appendix 1 at the back of this volume provides a list with contact addresses of other institutions which hold material from the 1930s excavations.

Notes

- 1 Important financial contributions also came from H. Dunscombe Colt (1932-33 season only), Sir Charles Marston and Sir Robert Mond. After Wellcome's death in 1936, Marston became co-sponsor of the excavations with the Wellcome Trustees. For a brief overview of the expedition's history and sponsors see L.II pp.9-10 and L.III pp.32-33.
- 2 Further excavations at Lachish were resumed on a limited scale in the 1960s by Y.Aharoni on behalf of Hebrew University and Tel Aviv University (see Aharoni 1975). Major excavations, directed by David Ussishkin of Tel Aviv University, began in 1973 and continued until the early 1990s (see Ussishkin 2004). For a good general overview of the work of all three expeditions see Ussishkin 1993.
- 3 Volume I had already appeared in 1938.
- 4 These areas, although published as 'The Cemeteries', also included pits, caves used for domestic and industrial purposes, and quarries as well as tombs.
- 5 This was originally dated by Tufnell to the Chalcolithic but is now considered Early Bronze Age I (EBI). See for example Gophna and Blockman 2004, p.885.
- 6 This period, also known as Intermediate Early Bronze- Middle Bronze (EB-MB), Middle Bronze I and Intermediate Bronze Age was originally described by Olga Tufnell in L.IV as 'the Caliciform Culture'. The term 'Early Bronze Age IV' is used on the British Museum collections database, so, for the sake of consistency, it has also been used throughout the handlist.
- 7 See L.II pp.95-97 (Appendix D); L.III pp.416-420 (Appendix C); and L.IV pp.332-337 (Appendix E).
- 8 Letter from J.L. Starkey to Mortimer Wheeler, October 29 1936 (unpublished document in folder 'INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY 1936-', Lachish Archive, Department of the Ancient Near East, British Museum).
- 9 For further details of Colt's connection with the expedition see L.III p.32 and Begin 2000, pp.42-49.
- 10 Pers. comm., Dr. Paul Collins (email of 26 January 2005).
- 11 Ackerman and Braunstein 1982 p.12.
- 12 Pers. comm., Dr. Susan Braunstein (email of 7 January 2005). A small number of Lachish objects (approximately 39 pieces) from the Jewish Museum collection were published in a 1982 museum catalogue. For details see Ackerman and Braunstein 1982.
- 13 'Progress Report' 53 (August-September 1951) (unpublished document, Lachish Archive, Department of the Ancient Near East, British Museum).
- 14 In the end the expedition did not have to leave the Institute in 1952 and remained there until publication of the excavation report was complete some six years later.
- 15 The Lachish Letters allocated to the British team had been on long term loan to the British Museum from at least the late 1930s. These, too, were formally presented to the Museum in 1956.
- 16 The connection between these two institutions is Rev. John Bowman, who was the head of the Department of Semitic Studies at the University of Leeds from 1948 until 1959 when he left to become a Professor at the University of Melbourne. The objects sent on loan are recorded in an unpublished, undated document in the University of Leeds archives (Bowman File) entitled 'List of Archaeological objects belonging to the Department of Semitic Languages and Literatures, Leeds University, and to be lent to the Department of Semitic Studies in the University of Melbourne, Australia.' I am grateful to Mrs. Mollie Bainbridge for bringing this document to my attention.
- 17 See note 7.

Essential Notes for Users

This handlist has been designed so that it can be used in conjunction with the original Lachish excavation report. The primary arrangement of the material is by excavation context, so the Contents list at the front of the volume can also function as an index of findspots. In addition, a series of five indices at the back of the book will allow readers to locate specific objects in a variety of other ways. These include: (1) a general index; (2) an index of Lachish pottery type numbers; (3) an index of Lachish excavation field numbers; (4) an index of British Museum registration numbers; and (5) an index of figure, page and plate references in volumes of the Lachish excavation report.

With a collection of over 17000 artefacts, it has only been possible to provide here a minimum amount of information about each piece. However, full details of all the objects in the handlist are recorded on the British Museum's collections database. For further information please contact:

The Department of the Ancient Near East
The British Museum
Great Russell Street
London WC1B 3DG
United Kingdom

E-mail: ancientneareast@thebritishmuseum.ac.uk

How the Handlist Works

The handlist is arranged as follows:

- by excavation context
- by chronological period (within each excavation context)
- by material / class of artefact (within each chronological period).

The material / class of artefact categories generally appear in the following order:

Pottery
Clay (Unfired)
Pottery Figurines
Metal
Flint
Stone
Bone/Ivory
Shell
Faience/Frit
Glass
Beads
Pendants
Amulets
Scarabs
Seals
Inscriptions
Coins
Animal Remains
Plant Remains
Miscellaneous

Within each of these categories, published objects are listed before the unpublished ones.

General Layout of Individual Entries

Most entries are set out in four columns. From left to right these contain: (1) a brief description of the object; (2) any publication references; (3) the Lachish excavation field number; and (4) the British Museum registration number.

Publication References

These take two forms:

- Pottery 'type numbers'. These refer to the Lachish excavation pottery type series and are given in the standard form of volume number: type number (e.g. L.II:3I, L.III:22 or L.IV:500).
- All other publication references simply give plate, figure or page numbers in the relevant volumes of the Lachish excavation report. (e.g. L.IV:pl.25.23; L.IV:Text fig.5.387; L.III:Text p.353 no.3I).

Lachish Excavation Field Numbers

- Excavation field numbers are always preceded by FN (e.g. FN3283)
- FN? indicates that the original field number is either illegible or uncertain.
- FN- indicates that an object was never assigned an excavation field number.
- Field numbers for objects from the North-East Section are given in bold type (e.g. **FN6**) in order to distinguish them from unrelated objects with the same field numbers. Unfortunately, field numbers already assigned elsewhere on the site were duplicated during the excavation of the North-East Section.

British Museum Registration Numbers¹

Over 99% of the objects in the Lachish Collection came to the British Museum in 1980 and have museum registration numbers which begin 1980,1214.— (e.g. 1980,1214.4769 or 1980,1214.12038). For reasons of space only the final part of this number is listed for each object.

Note: when contacting the Department of the Ancient Near East about any of these objects in the handlist, it is essential to give the full registration number.

A small number of objects came to the Museum in the 1950s. Their registration numbers take the form of a six figure serial number or 'Big Number' which is given in the handlist in bold type (e.g. **132827**) in order to distinguish them from the 1980 series.

Note: when contacting the Department of the Ancient Near East regarding these objects, it is only necessary to quote this six figure number.

Unpublished Pottery Sherds

Unpublished sherd material is not set out in the four column arrangement described above. Instead, sherds are grouped according to type of vessel and excavation field number.

The entries are presented as follows:

- for single sherds: (vessel type) FN.../ British Museum Registration Number; (e.g. (bowl) FN3291/2796);
- for groups of sherds: (vessel type) all FN...: British Museum Registration Numbers; (e.g. (bowls) all FN3286: 2017; 2800; 2846; 2883).

Chronological Terms

In general the chronological terms used in the handlist follow those used by Tufnell in the Lachish excavation report. Please note, however, the following:

- nearly all the material dated by Tufnell in L.IV to the Chalcolithic is now considered to be Early Bronze Age I (EBI)

and is so described in the handlist;²

- Early Bronze Age II and Early Bronze Age III material has simply been listed as Early Bronze Age and is not subdivided;
- material originally described by Tufnell as 'Caliciform' is listed here as Early Bronze Age IV.³

LMLK Seal Impressions

No publication references are given in the handlist for LMLK seal impressions because there are difficulties in reconciling specific examples listed here with the original excavation report. Instead readers should consult Barkay and Vaughn 2004 for an up-to-date and comprehensive account of the LMLK seal impressions from the 1930s excavations.

Notes

- ¹ Also see Appendix 2.
- ² See Introduction, note 5.
- ³ See Introduction, note 6.

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