



**PROFESSOR YOHANAN AHARONI**  
1919—1976

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IN MEMORIAM

When we come to appraise the life work of Professor Yohanan Aharoni, a personality of unique characteristics emerges. The crowning achievement of his labours, which he began as excursion-leader for youth movements and kibbutzim, was his environmental study of the biblical Negeb. Aharoni delved deeply into his subject, combining his first-hand acquaintance of the country with a profound knowledge of its written history.

Aharoni was first and foremost a historical-geographer. He defined this discipline for his students and expanded the theme in his book *The Land of the Bible* as the science of synthesis—a synthesis that may be attained through the interweaving of geographical, historical and archaeological research.

This synthesis found its full expression in the personality of Aharoni, and this is the quality that attracted the many who were to become his disciples, whether they were acquainted with him through personal contact or through his first scientific research, *The Settlement of the Israelite Tribes in the Upper Galilee*. This book was actually his doctoral dissertation at the Hebrew University, written under the guidance of Prof. B. Mazar, his spiritual mentor; and the scientific methodology introduced in this work was subsequently developed into a centralized approach to the study of the historical-geography of the ancient Land of Israel.

His method is based on the collection and study of all existing literary evidence pertaining to a particular region, a re-examination of the historical documentation, the posing of pertinent questions concerning the process of settlement, political boundaries and the historical events that befell the region, and finally an attempt to find answers to these questions through interpretation of the archaeological remains.

An exact archaeological survey, excavation of selected sites discovered in the survey, the collation of direct knowledge of the region and its remains with historical texts: this is in essence the methodology of Aharoni.

During the past years, Aharoni was engaged in research on the ancient Negeb. He began his work as an archaeologist on the staff of Prof. M. Evenari in a study of early agriculture in the Negeb, and continued with his own independent research on the Negeb trade routes and fortresses, eventually devoting his major efforts to the biblical Negeb, that is, the Beer-sheba region.

The two central tells in this region—Arad to the east and Beer-sheba in the west—were excavated by Aharoni over the past 12 years,—and simultaneously, as part of the same project—Tel Masos and Tel Malḥata were also excavated. This study, which is the first of its kind to be carried out in Israel, may be considered an elaboration of the methodology innovated by Aharoni in Galilee. This additional step specifies that regional research through archaeological surveys and small-scale excavations alone are not sufficient, but must be based on extensive excavations of most of the central sites in the region. This project, which was prematurely terminated, had already begun to bear fruit with the publication of *Beer-sheba I*, as well as blazing a trail for the future projects that will follow.

It is essential to mention an additional quality of Aharoni's character: his pioneering enthusiasm. Aharoni was the first Israeli scholar to explore the caves of the Judean Desert (in 1953) in the footsteps of Bar-Kochba. Surmounting difficult conditions and practically without material means, he excavated the cave in Nahal Hever which he called the "Cave of Horror", as well as the cave which subsequently came to be known as the "Cave of the Letters." The story of this pioneering expedition appears—in addition to the scientific publication—in the popular book which he wrote in collaboration with Dr. B. Rothenberg, *In the Footsteps of Kings and Rebels in the Judean Desert*.

The major undertaking of exploring the caves of Bar-Kochba was also begun through the initiative of Aharoni at the head of a small group of students and volunteers in the caves of Nahal Tseelim in 1960. The discovery of *tefillin* and other fragments of writing in these caves led to the organization of the large-scale expedition that eventually discovered the Bar-Kochba letters and other finds from this period. Aharoni was also a member of the first archaeological expedition to Massada, which included the late Prof. M. Avi-Yonah, Prof. N. Avigad, and the long-time Massada explorer, Mr. Sh. Guttman.

This pioneering spirit also resulted in the founding of the Institute of Archaeology at Tel Aviv University. Aharoni regarded this institute not only as an instrument for combining teaching and research, but also a means of achieving cooperation through the independent efforts of various scholars.

From the very beginning of his research Aharoni concentrated on the study of the Iron Age in the Land of Israel—or according to his preferred terminology, "the Israelite Period"; his contribution to our knowledge of this subject is of profound significance. He explored the nature of the settlement of the Israelite tribes both in Upper Galilee and in the Negeb. His last work on this subject stressed the antiquity of Israel "in its land," and he mustered archaeological epigraphical and historical evidence to support his view that the Israelite settlement had its beginnings as early as the 14th century B.C.E.

As field supervisor with the Hazor expedition, Aharoni excavated the casemate wall and gate of the Solomonic period and was the first to date them accurately. His discovery of remains from this period also at Beer-sheba and Arad brought him to a re-evaluation of the building enterprises of King David at Megiddo, Tel Dan and other sites. The Israelite temples that existed from the days of Solomon and onwards at Arad, and the cultic remains at Lachish and Beer-sheba turned his attention to

the problem of religious worship in Judah and Israel and the role of sanctuaries in defining political borders of the country in antiquity. At Beer-sheba he uncovered a well-planned city which had been destroyed by Sennacherib: and at Arad, which was repeatedly razed and rebuilt, Aharoni was able to place the stratigraphy and ceramic chronology of the Kingdom of Judah on a firmer foundation than ever before.

The particular attention he paid to each and every sherd of pottery yielded fruits at Arad and resulted in the discovery of a large archive of the Kingdom of Judah belonging to this period; by means of these ostraca found in stratigraphic context, he was the first to refine the development of Hebrew palaeography on a stratigraphic basis. The volume of *Arad Inscriptions*, which was published only a few months prior to his death, earned him the Ben-Zvi award.

The final phase of the monarchal period was illucidated by Aharoni in his excavations at Ramat Rahel. The results of this excavation included the palace of one of the last kings of Judah, royal (*lamelekh*) seals, and seal impressions of the Jewish governors of the autonomous province of Yehud, which was centered around Jerusalem during the period of the Persian Empire.

The teachings of Aharoni can be found throughout scores of articles in scientific journals in Israel and abroad and are summarized in his books, *The Land of the Bible*, the Macmillan *Atlas of the Bible* (written together with Prof. M. Avi-Yonah), and a new *Archaeology of the Land of Israel*—the manuscript of which he managed to complete only a few weeks before he passed away.

It is impossible to conclude even a brief eulogy on Aharoni the scholar without describing Yohanan Aharoni the man—a man of modest demeanour, a man of the people, a friend to all, who even upon attaining the heights of his scientific career, remained the same “kibbutznik,” unassuming and open-hearted, the ideal image of a scholar of Israel.

Moshe Kochavi

This volume of *Tel Aviv* opens with an article by Professor Y. Aharoni, written during the last weeks of his life. The volume will close with a bibliography of his scholarly works. In this manner we wish to express our deep respect for one whose imprint is indelibly stamped on our Institute and its publications.

The Editors