

Qadesh on the Orontes

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In Buried History (Vol. II, No. 3) reference was made to the preliminary archaeological investigation to be made at the site of the city of Qadesh on the Orontes, Tell Nebi Mend. The following report was written by Mr. Christopher Davey, the surveyor for the team (who will probably be joining the staff of our Institute later next year), with some contributions from Mr. Alan Millard. We are grateful to Mr. Peter Parr, the director of the dig, and the Institute of Archaeology, London University, for their ready permission for this report to be published.

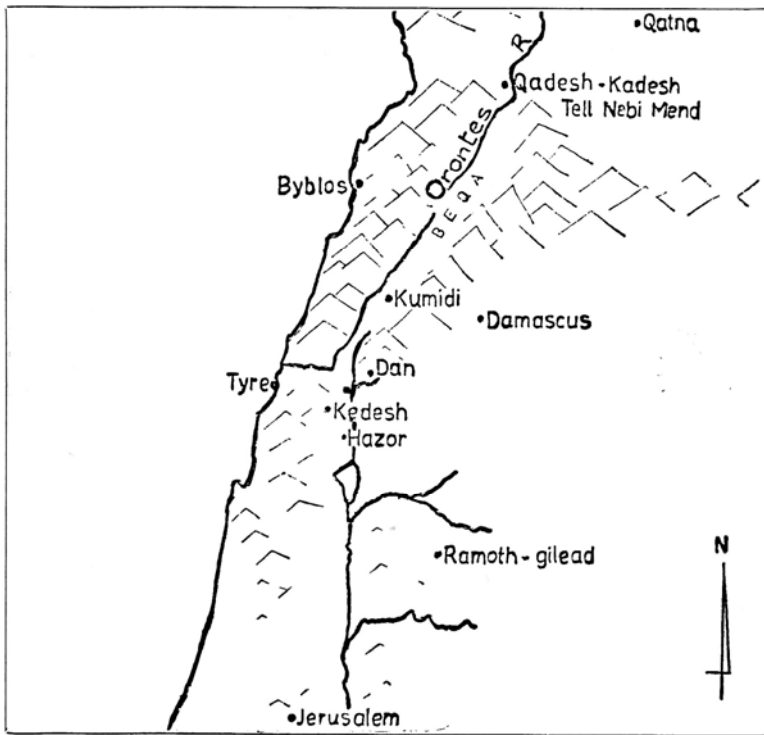
One of the highest tells in Syria today is to be found about thirty kilometres south-west of the city of Homs. Here, on the west bank of the River Orontes, the village and tell of Nebi Mend are situated. The village which today occupies the tell has nothing which would distinguish it from any other, but the earth on which it is built is believed to contain much of the material history of an important ancient city, Qadesh.

Qadesh on the Orontes is not mentioned in the traditional Hebrew text of the Old Testament. However, in describing the census taken by Joab for King David we find the unintelligible phrase, 'The land of Tahtim-hodshi' (2 Sam. 24:6 A.V. and R.V.). One Greek text, that of Lucian produced in about A.D. 300, has instead, 'the land of the Hittites, Qadesh' and it is this that is adopted by the R.S.V. and N.E.B. More recently the Dead Sea Scrolls have shown that there is an ancient text behind the work of Lucian, adding weight to his translation at this point. There are other possible readings, but clearly it is intriguing to consider that David's Kingdom, which he directly controlled, may have included the Beqa Valley and Qadesh. Strategically it is certainly possible. David defeated the Aramean king of Zobah, Hadadezar, and took control of Betah and Berothai, cities

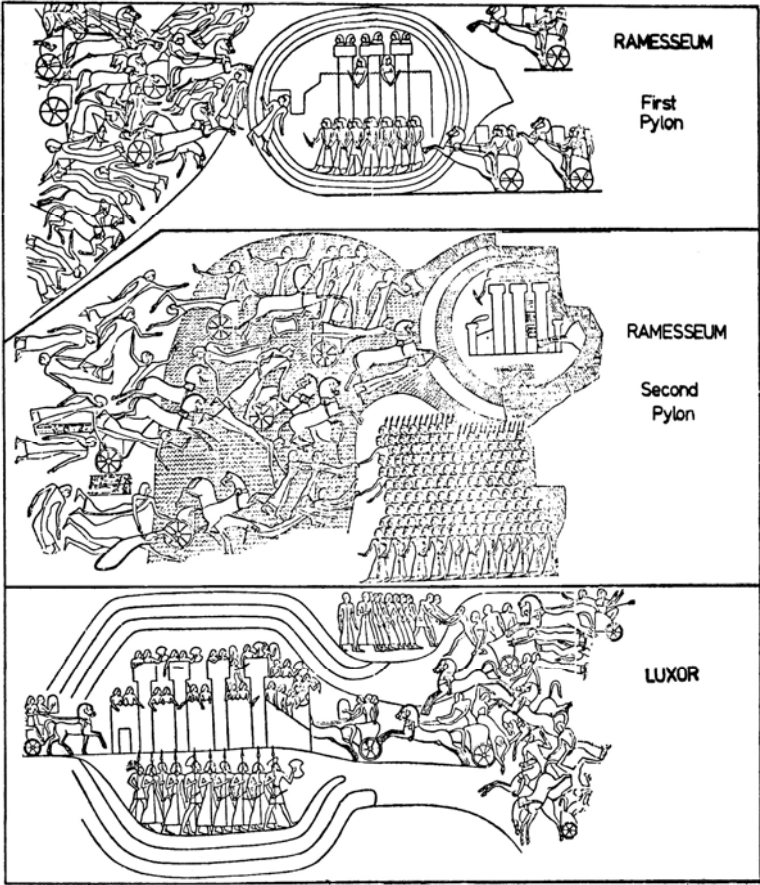
in the Beqa Valley (2 Sam. 8:3 ff). It is possible that the Aramean kingdom centred on Damascus continued as a vassalstate of David while the Beqa Valley passed directly into his control.

A Classic Battle

Qadesh is famous for an event which took place there about 300 years before King David. The city is situated at the northern end of the mountains of Lebanon and anti-Lebanon. This places it on a natural boundary between the northern Levant, where the Mitianians and the Hittites established their empires, and the south where Egypt colonised. The region of Qadesh was therefore the site of many battles, the most well-known of which occurred



Map of the Southern Levant in about 1000 B.C. showing Qadesh in relation to Palestine. (The Biblical Kadesh usually refers to Kadesh Barnea south of Palestine.)



in about 1285 B.C. between Pharaoh Ramesses II of Egypt and the Hittite King Muwatallish. Both Hittite and Egyptian records mention the battle; Ramesses in particular decorated a number of his buildings with descriptions and pictorial representations of the battle claiming a great victory for himself. In fact it seems that Ramesses was fortunate to survive a well-planned surprise attack by the Hittites and retreated in haste: it was a number of years before he re-established full control in the southern Levant. Fifteen years later Ramesses II made a treaty with the Hittite king, Khattushilish, and although copies of it survive, it does not state the territorial boundaries. It is most likely that in the relative peace that followed the treaty, the Israelites entered the land of Canaan, following their exodus from Egypt.

Although there are many publications dealing with the tactics of the battle between Ramesses II and Muwatallish, the only map of the area available today is a sketch map made in about 1890. The first objective, then, of the present excavation team was a contour map of the site. This has been almost completed. The thick growth around the two rivers that pass the site, the Orontes and the Al-Mukadiyah, together with the occupation of the tell by a busy village, made the survey work involved in making the map rather difficult.

Topography of the Site

All the representations of Qadesh in Egyptian reliefs show a walled city with a double set of moats around it. The precise nature of this defence has often been considered and used as an argument against the identification of Tell Nebi Mend with Qadesh because the tell does not seem to have anything resembling this configuration of fortifications. However, to the west and south of the tell an artificially dug ditch and rampart was found. It is square in plan, resembling the Middle Bronze Age (1800-1500 B.C.) defences at nearby Qatna. Although the ramparts at Qatna and Tell Mardikh to the north are much higher, the similarities must be investigated in future excavation seasons.

All major cities in Syria and Palestine during the second millennium B.C. had large lower town areas enclosed within their



Village and Tell of Nebi Mend. In the foreground is the At-Mukadiyah and to the right is the smaller mound of the lower town where there are extensive Roman remains.

walls (Hazor for example) and Qadesh should be no exception. However, surface material south of the tell is mainly Roman and only excavations will reveal any earlier remains.

Inscriptions Discovered

In two of the four trenches dug in September, 1975, inscribed material was found. An incised sherd bearing 11½ cuneiform signs of the shorter 'Ugaritic' alphabet was found in a Late Bronze Age (1550-1200 B.C.) stratum. There are only a few texts of this script and they belong to the 12th and 13th centuries B.C.

In another Late Bronze Age stratum, a tablet was found which is dated between 1350 and 1325 B.C. It is a letter from the king of Aleppo to a man whose name is pronounced Ari-Teshup, if the name is Hurrian in origin. Ari-Teshup is probably the son of Aitakama, who is known as the king of Qadesh from the letters found at Tell el-Amarna. We are informed by a Hittite tablet that Aitakama was murdered by his son in the ninth year of the Hittite king, Murshilish II, and that Qadesh subsequently became a vassal-city of the Hittites. A number of other tablets were found in the same area as the first, but as yet they have not been

Opposite: Contour map of Qadesh prepared by the 1975 expedition. Note ditch (left), possibly the key to Egyptian drawings, and the shallow mound of the lower city (compare picture above) where Roman remains are located.



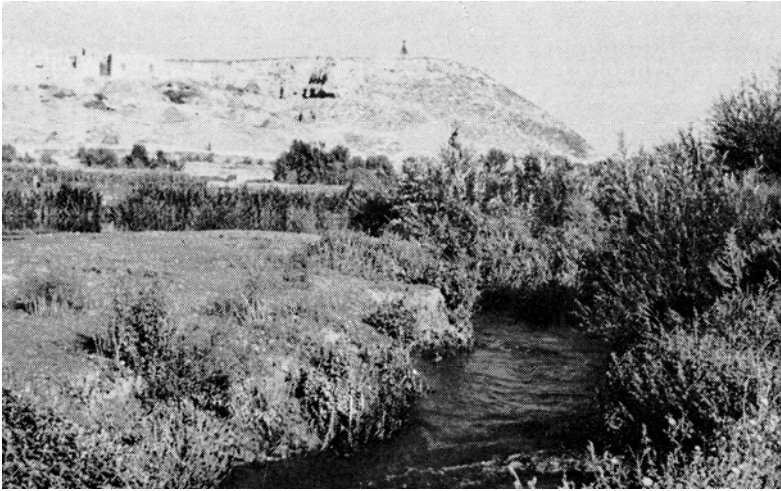
read because they were discovered during the last few days of the excavation.

The tablets were located only a few inches below the surface in a trench which was dug on a terrace at the north-east corner of the tell. This terrace was formed by the French archaeologists who dug there in 1921-22. Had they not formed it, the entire area would now be covered by a cemetery, making excavation impossible. As it is, the twelve metres of Greek, Roman and Iron Age occupation debris have been removed, leaving what may well prove to be an important administrative area or palace of the Late Bronze Age just under the surface.



Trench in Late Bronze strata (Area A) . A tanur (oven) is right centre, while the tablets were found in the far left section. The sloping layer of coarse material above the overt marks the old surface of the fell.

A little to the south of this the French cut a large trench, the bottom of which is five metres below the terrace. Excavation here found the town wall which belonged to the Middle Bronze Age town. A considerable amount of debris has accumulated in the bottom of the trench since the French dug it, but when



Section of the north of Tell Nebi Mend from the east. A deep trench cut by the French excavators in 1921-22 is right of the village, whilst the cemetery is above this (far right).

cleared, there will be a large area of Middle Bronze Age occupation available for excavation.

Results of the 1975 Dig

The 1975 season of excavation has found that without a great deal of extra work it will be possible to excavate in Middle Bronze Age, Late Bronze Age and Iron Age levels on the tell itself and in Roman levels in the lower town. The ramparts located south and west of the tell may well explain the unusual Egyptian reliefs of Qadesh. Most important, however, is that the tablet which was found confirms that Tell Nebi Mend is in fact the ancient Qadesh on the Orontes.