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Paper: The excavations at Tell Tacannek reconsidered

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Tell Tacannek is situated on a northern foothill of the Samaritan hill country and on the fringe of the fertile Jezreel valley. Tacanach drew its historical importance and its cultural characteristics from being located at the crossing of the east-west-road running from the Mediterranean coast to the Jordan and east-Jordanian area and a branch of the important and famous via maris, that ultimately connects Egypt with Syria and Mesopotamia. The archaeology of the site shows that it has been occupied as early as from about the 28th into the 5th century BCE.

The excavations at Tell Tacannek by Ernst Sellin, then in Vienna, Austria, in the years 1902 to 1904 were a pioneering effort in the archaeology of Palestine. They were one of the first

excavations in Palestine, then under Ottoman rule, and the first one in the north. Besides the usual material found in an excavation some very special objects were found, i.e. 12 (resp. 14) tablets with cuneiform script – up to the present the only, though small cuneiform archive from Palestine – and two cultic stands, one of which could be reconstructed and built up again. Sellin published his results very quickly in two parts in 1904 and 1906.

In the American excavations in 1963, 1966, and 1968, headed by Paul W. Lapp, the results of the Sellin excavations were examined, but also many new discoveries were made and another cult stand and two more cuneiform tablets were found. Several preliminary excavation reports were published, and parts of the planned final report. Further analysis of the pottery has still to be done; the discussion of the cuneiform texts from Tell Tacannek is in progress.

In 2006, the University of Vienna initiated a renewed study on excavations at Tell Tacannek and the cuneiform tablets. Along with a reprint of Sellin's publications, the studies are meanwhile published in a jubilee volume that allows perspectives for future research which will be presented here.