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The Political Economy of the Canaanite Palace of Kabri

Tel Kabri, in the western Galilee of modern day Israel, is a large, 34 ha site, surrounded by rich agricultural land. During the Middle Bronze Age it was the center of a Canaanite polity. Its location, 5 km from the Mediterranean coast, facilitated its connections to major land routes, as well as to the Mediterranean Sea. The palace of Kabri, a vast structure, covering up to 6000 m², was extensively excavated over the last decade by an expedition co-directed by Assaf Yasur-Landau and Eric H. Cline. Maritime trade provided access to imported goods, such as Cypriot pottery and cedar from Lebanon, as well as to technology of Aegean style wall and floor paintings. At the same time, there are no signs of literate administration in the palace, or even of an administrative use of sealings. Patterns of animal husbandry, textile production, pottery manufacture and consumption, and storage within the palace all provide evidence that it behaved economically more like an estate than like a redistributive center. This is in contrast to contemporary Alalakh and Ebla in Syria, as well as to Kabri's neighbor to the east, Tel Hazor, which all had literate administrations and redistributive economies. The recent find of large wine storage rooms, which contained up to 16,000 liter of red wine mixed with resin and with other herbal additives, may provide an unexpected explanation to the ways Canaanite rulership used the palatial economy to further its political goals.



Assaf Yasur-Landau is an Associate Professor in the Department of Maritime Civilizations at the University of Haifa. He has published extensively on the Philistines and anthropological approaches to the archaeology of ancient Israel. Since 2005 he co-directs the excavations of Tel Kabri in Israel, where frescoes in the Middle Bronze Age palace have exposed long-distance connections with the Minoan world during the first half of the second millennium B.C.E. In addition to his terrestrial archaeological work, he is also conducting maritime archaeological excavations off the coast of Israel.