

# What is in a Name? 'Akko - Ptolemais - 'Akka - Acre

## *¿Qué hay en un nombre? 'Akko - Ptolemais - 'Akka - Acre*

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The modern city of 'Akko in Israel has borne many names over the centuries of its extended settlement. The name Acre, as it is known in the Western World, is the remnant of the name, St. Jean d'Acre, given to it by its Crusader settlers in the 12<sup>th</sup> century CE. However, the name 'Akko and its derivatives has a long history. It appeared as such already in written sources at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Millennium BCE when the first urbanization of the site took place. It remained as 'Akko, 'Ake, etc... throughout the subsequent centuries, despite attempts by its varied rulers to change it. The settlement shifted, following the changes of the coastline and the Na'aman (Belos) River; from the ancient Tel Akko, to the bay, where an artificial harbor was established, re-constructed and repeatedly renovated during the 2000 or more years. The first known name of the original site of the settlement, the tell, is dated to the Crusader period. It experienced alteration of name, echoing the transformation of 'Akko's history, in which the Western (European) intervention played a major role.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Tel Akko, 'Akka, Ptolemais, Saint Jean d'Acre, Crusaders, Napoleon.*

### **RESUMEN**

*La actual ciudad de Akko in Israel, ha tenido muchos nombres a lo largo de los siglos de su prolongado asentamiento. El nombre de Acre, con el que se le conoce en el mundo Occidental, es el residuo del nombre de San Juan de Acre que le dieron sus habitantes cruzados en el s. XII de la era Cristiana. Sin embargo, el nombre de 'Akko y sus derivados, tienen una larga historia. Bajo tal nombre, aparece ya en las fuentes escritas de comienzos el II Milenio a.C., cuando e produjo la primera urbanización del lugar. Se mantuvo como 'Akko, 'Ake, etc... a lo largo de los siglos posteriores, a pesar de los intentos de varios dirigentes de cambiárelo. El asentamiento se trasladó, a causa de los cambios en la línea de costa y del río Na'aman o Belos, desde el antiguo Tel Akko a la bahía, en la que se estableció un puerto artificial, reconstruido y renovado reiteradamente durante más de 2000 años. El primer nombre conocido del sitio original del asentamiento, el tell, data de época de los cruzados. Este sufrió una alteración de su nombre, reflejo de la transformación de la historia de Akko, en la que la intervención occidental (europea), jugó un papel decisivo.*

**PALABAS CLAVE:** *Tel Akko, 'Akka, Ptolemais, San Juan de Acre, cruzados, Napoleón.*

### Akko/Akka/Aca

Akko/Acre one of the longest-settled sites in the world. Its official name is Akko today and the locals refer to it is either Akko or 'Akka, the Hebrew and Arabic versions of the name. It is a multi-cultural city, where Mosques, Churches, Synagogues and an important Bahai center live side by side. Hebrew and Arabic intermingle with the languages of the newcomers and tourists in this colorful city. Its urbanized history starts at least 4000 years ago, when the site of Tel Akko was fortified with an impressive rampart. In addition, the effects of the urbanization were noted in the changes in ecological remains at about the same period (Kaniewski et al. 2013). The tell, situated today ca. 2 kilometers from the sea, continued to be inhabited until the early to mid 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE (**fig. 1**). It was at this time that the main habitation shifted from the tell to the peninsula, where today an active small harbor is located (Artzy and Beeri 2010; Artzy and Quartemaine 2014). It is this part which has been declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO since it is a historic site where remains of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem (11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries CE), and fortifications dating to the Ottoman period as

well as public buildings like khans and mosques are preserved. Akko served as an important harbor and eventually the capital of the Crusaders after the fall of Jerusalem in the 13<sup>th</sup> century CE. Today, this ancient part of 'Akko is referred to as the "Old City."

Over the centuries, Akko has seen several changes. The site of Akko may appear in the Ebla texts dating to ca. 2400-2250 BCE (Matthiae 1981, Fig. 9). Akko is one of several coastal sites, including Byblos, Sidon, Dor, Ashdod and Gaza, on the itinerary of a merchant from Ebla, although no archaeological remains dating to the Early Bronze II or III, which are the periods corresponding to the fluorite in the Ebla tablet were found so far on the tell. Remains of the Early Bronze I, however, were documented previously. The city was mentioned again in the early Egyptian Execration Texts of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Millennium BCE (Posner 1940:31-34) and archaeologically, besides the impressive rampart, imports from the Lebanese coast as well as from Cyprus were found in situ mainly during the excavations directed by Moshe Dothan on the summit of the tell and in and around the early 2<sup>nd</sup> Millennium city gate (Dothan 1976; Dothan and Raban 1990; Artzy and Beeri 2010; Beeri 2008). The same



**Fig. 1.** Tel Akko with "Old City" in the background. (Photo: Michal Artzy).

name of the city remained and appears in Egyptian sources as well as Ugaritic ones. In the El Amarna letters, Akko's kings (father and son) sent letters to the Pharaohs; it is mentioned several times. In El Amarna 245 the king of Megiddo, Biridiya blames Surata, the king of Akko for letting yet another king, Lab'ayu of Shechem escape when he was supposed to send him by ship to the Pharaoh. We feel that this evidence points to the fact that Akko was used as the harbor for the Egyptian authorities. Further, in El Amarna letter 234, Satatna, king of Akka, writes: "Akka is like Magdalu in Egypt..." which accentuates the loyalty to the Egyptian authorities or to the Egyptian nature of Akko (Moran 1992:293, note 5). Evidence for the importance of the city during that time can be noted in several letters. In one of the letters (EA 85), the king of Byblos (Gubla), Rib Adda asks to have a comparable grant to that of Surata (King of Akko), which consists of 400 men and 30 pairs of horses (Moran 1947:156). Akko by that name was mentioned in the Old Testament as being a city 'not inherited' by the Israelites (Judges 1:31-32). It is likely that Akko was part of the payment of king Solomon to king Hiram of Tyre, for the construction of the palaces and temple in Jerusalem, although it is not mentioned by name (Kings 9:12). Akcho, as it appears in the King James is a town, which the Israelites, namely the Tribe of Asher, did not conquer and so they settled among the Canaanites (Judges 1:31-32). The name of Akko continues well into the 1<sup>st</sup> Millennium. It is mentioned by the Assyrians in the Annals of Senacharib and Esarhaddon as well as by Assurbanipal. The name did not change. It is further mentioned in the Persian Annals of king Artaxerxes II (Diodorus Siculus XV 41.1-3). It still bore the name Akko/Akka/Aca (Dothan 1976).

### Ptolemais

The town moved down to the peninsula sometime in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, although habitation on the tell, albeit rather poor dwellings, were noted and the latest coins date to the early part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE. It was likely at a slightly earlier time that the greater number of the inhabitants moved away from the tell to the Peninsula, where an artificial harbor was constructed. While previous scholars attributed the construction of the 'Phoenician' artificial harbor to the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, it is likely that

Ptolemy II, Philadelphus was the instigator of the massive construction. At that time the name of the city was changed to Antiocha Ptolemais. The official name, and especially that appearing on coins minted at Akko during the Hellenistic and Roman periods, has been addressed in the past by Kindler (1978). He mentions the name Ace-Ptolemais, Germanica, during the reign of Claudius 41-54 CE (Kindler 1978:54), but accentuates the fact that the original name AKH reappears in a mid 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE:

This indicates that the original name persisted tenaciously in folk memory of the city and its use was never entirely abandoned... (Kindler 178:54).

It is likely that the name Ptolemais continued to be officially used until the Arab conquest, although this is not necessarily the name used by the local inhabitants. Following the Seleucid rule the Romans used the harbor of Akko. It is likely that the local population continued to be of Phoenician and Greek extraction.

For example, one of the coins minted under Nero (about 53 CE) shows the emperor ploughing the city borders with a plough harnessed to a pair of oxen in a ceremony called *pomerium*, a symbol for the establishment of a new colony (Kindler 1978:54). Remains dating to the Roman period have been found, some alongside later Hellenistic finds (2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE), mainly north of the Peninsula (Abu Hamid 2012). Other salvage excavations report Roman and early Byzantine finds, among them: Feig (2011) and Tatcher (2010). A part of a Roman road, likely connecting the city with Damascus was also noted (Finkielsztejn 2007). A large Roman cemetery was found at the northwestern foothill of the tell (Tepper 2010). However, the latest Hellenistic/Roman remains found so far on the tell date to the Second century BCE. Ptolemais, Ace-Ptolemais, etc. called after the Hellenistic rulers and Romans was the name of the town on the Peninsula and not of the tell, which was abandoned during most of this period. The latest coin in a poor habitation stratum on the tell itself (area G) is dated to the time of Antiochus IV, Epiphanes of the Seleucid dynasty, ca. 170 BCE. We have no idea what name the local populace gave to the tell an obvious site of former habitation from where building material could be had for secondary use. It is likely that the abandoned site was used for small farms, but there is no archaeological data to

support the possibility. There is no question that by the time of the Arab conquest in the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE, the name of the city returned officially and colloquially to Akka/Ace, etc...

### 'Akka

Akko is mentioned in Hitti's translation of the text attributed to 9<sup>th</sup> century historian Ahmad Ibn Yahya al-Baladhuri named *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan*. Note that Hitti used in his translation the name Acre, although he does mention that the name in the text itself appears as 'Akka. The text refers to Mu'awiyah who established the Umayyad Dynasty of the caliphate in the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE. While the manuscript, dated to the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE uses the name "Akka, Hitti in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century names the town Acre. We feel that the reason has to do with a western vs. eastern cultural tradition, but possible reasons are to be addressed later in this study.

According to a tradition communicated to me by Muhammad ibn- Sa'd on the authority of al-Wakidi, and by Hisham ibn al-Laith as-Suri on the authority of certain sheikhs from Syria, when Mu'awiyah came to sail from Acre to Cyprus he made repairs in Acre ['Akka] and in Tyre [Sur]. Later both cities were rebuilt by 'Abd al-Malik ibn-Marwan, after having fallen into ruins. Hisham ibn-al-Laith from our sheikhs who said: "When we took up our abode in Tyre and the littoral, there were Arab troops and many Greeks already there. Later, people from other regions came and settled with us, and that was the case with all the sea-coast of Syria.(Hitti 1916:180).

Mukaddasi, writing in 985 CE writes describes the town, which is in the District of Al-Urdunn (the Jordan):

-Its capital is Tabariyyah (Tiberias). Among the towns are: Kadas, Sur (Tyre), 'Akka (Acre),... (Le Strange 1890:39).

'Akkà is a fortified city on the sea... this city remained unfortified until the time when Ibn Tûlûn (the ruler of Egypt) visited it, coming from Tyre, where he had seen the fortifications and the walls which are there carried around so as to protect the harbour. Then Ibn Tûlûn wished to construct at 'Akkà

a fortification that should be as impregnable as that of Tyre. (LeStrange:1890:328).

In his book *Le Strange* uses 'Akkah and the derivatives of the name in most of the translations of the old manuscripts. But he reverts to Acre when referring to the town and at times even in the manuscript's translation. For instance:

Our next account of Acre is written by the Persian Pilgrim Nâsir who visited the city in 1047: "After leaving Tyre we traveled 7 leagues, and came to the township of 'Akkah, which, in official documents is name *Madinat 'Akkah*. The city stands on an eminence, the ground sloping, but in part it is level; for all along this coast they only build towns where there is an elevation, being in terror of an encroachment of the waves of the sea. The Friday Mosque at Acre (!) is in the center of the town, and rises taller than all the other edifices. (Le Strange 1890:329).

### Acre

In the first years of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the walled city of Akko was breached and conquered by the Crusader army, lead by Baldwin I, king of Jerusalem. It became one of the important Crusader ports, where merchants and the military orders settled. Akko reverted to a western-like harbor city. The Crusaders named it Saint John d'Acre after the Knights Hospitaller of St. John. A possibly mistaken name might recall the Biblical Philistine 'Eqron, where Beel Zebub was said to have resided in Eqron (I Kings: 1:2-3). Was it because of the Tower of The Flies in the entrance to the harbor, since Zebub means fly in Hebrew? In 1187 the city was captured by the Muslim army, but in 1191 was recaptured by the Third crusade, led by Richard the Lion-Heart. Jerusalem remained under the Muslim rule and thus Saint Jean d'Acre gained importance by becoming, not only the main harbor of the western kingdom, but also its capital. In a text dated to 1185, the Spaniard Ibn Jubair who visited the town wrote:

'Akkah is the chief of the Frank cities of Syria, the great port of the sea, and the great anchorage for their ships, being second only to Constantinople. It is the meeting-place of Muslim and Christian merchants of all lands... (Le Strange 1890:332).

Yakût wrote in 1295 after the final fall of the Crusader Saint Jean d'Acre in 1291 CE:

...the Franks again took 'Akkah from the hands of the Muslims... (Le Strange 1890:333).

Yakût was not aware, apparently, of the re-conquest, or did not change that part of his manuscript, but in a later manuscript ca. 1300 CE, which made use of his writing according to Le Strange, it is stated:

'Akkah was retaken from the Franks in 690(1291) by al Malik al Ashraf ibn Kalaun (the Mamluk sultan of Egypt,... (Le Strange 1890:333).

But even during this time, forms of the old name, now more than 3000 years old were used by many outside the European Crusader world. For instance, in the Cairo Geniza, a collection of thousands of Jewish manuscript fragments found in the Ben Ezra Synagogue at Fustat, Akko was mentioned several times. In a letter dating from the end of 1029 CE, "Akko is mentioned alongside Tyre, where the writer informs his reader that he has to stay until the winter is over and sailing resumes (1983:II, 388). In another letter also dated to the 11<sup>th</sup> century CE (February 1039) the name of 'Akkā is mentioned alongside Rameleh (Gil 1983:II,314). In letters dating once again to the 13<sup>th</sup> century the name of the city is called 'Akka. Later letters from the period of the Crusader's control of Akko, namely 1239 and 1240 CE, also use a derivative of Akko (Gil 1997:II, 60 and 340).

'Akka was the city's name during the Mameluke period following the fall of the Crusader town up until the early 16<sup>th</sup> century CE, and then later when Daher el-Amar renewed the port and the fortifications in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century CE. The name continued to be used in the Ottoman period by authorities and likely by the locals. It was the name when, in the last days of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Napoleon tried in vain to conquer the city from the Ottoman Bosnian Ahmed al Jazzar, named also Jazzar Pasha or Jazzar the Butcher. There was no change in the name as long as the Ottoman Empire ruled the area and the name continues to be pronounced as 'Akka by the Arab inhabitants of the site and 'Akko in the Hebrew spelling. Obviously, a small change in the name over the many centuries and millennia is expected.

In 1738, Richard Pococke, Bishop of Meath, visited the area and drew a map of St Jean d'Acre. Unfortunately, his map does not include the tell or its surroundings, but he did write a verbal account in which he describes the tell, including an estimate of its size:

The antient (!) name of this city was Ake, or, as it is called in scripture, Accho; it was one of the places, out which Asser did not drive the antient inhabitants, and seems always to have retained this name among the natives of the country, for the Arabs call it Akka at this time. The Greeks gave it the name of Ptolemais, from one of the Ptolemies, kings of Aegypt. And when it was in the possession of the knights of St. John of Jerusalem, it was called St. John d'Acre. (1745:52).

And yet when he continues writing about the city and in his case describes the ancient tell, he refers to the city as Acre!

As Acre is so remarkable in history, I took some pains in examining the ground and country about it. Half a mile east of the city is a small hill, improved by art; it is about half a mile in length and a quarter of a mile broad, and is very steep every way, except to the south-west. This was probably the camp of the besiegers, as it was a fine situation for that purpose; and the Patsha pitches his tent on this hill when he goes the yearly circuits to receive his tribute. To the north of this there is an irregular rising ground, where there are great ruins of vault, some of which seem to have been reservoirs of water... (Pococke 1745:54).

The attempt to change the name of a settlement, especially when languages of different origins are involved, is not particular to Akko. As Le Strange noted already in the 1890's: The place-names in Syria and Palestine form an interesting record, bearing the impress of the various nations and creeds that, during successive epochs, have held dominion in the Holy Land.

The Canaanite and the Hebrew, the Greek, the Roman and the Byzantine, the Arab and the Turk, all have in turn imposed their names on the towns they founded or rebuilt – as a glance over the following pages

will show. But in spite of foreign invasion and settlement, the bulk of the population of Syria always has been, and is still, Semitic in race, and hence it is natural to find that the great majority of the place-names are Semitic (Hebrew, Aramaic or Arabic) in etymology.

After the Arab conquest in the seventh century, the majority of the Greek names imposed by the Byzantines (and by their predecessors, the Romans and the successors of Alexander) fell into disuse, their places being once again taken by the older Semitic names, which probably had never fallen into desuetude among the rural and therefore purely Semitic, population of the country. ... Of places which the Greeks renamed, but of which the Greek name was, at the Arab conquest, replaced by the older Semitic form are such cities as: 'Akka (St Jean d'Acre) called in Judges Achcho, which the Greeks named Ptolemais;... (Le Strange 1890:379).

Following the Le Strange's observation, it can also be added that the guttural sound of the 'A appears in the original language of the Old Testament Hebrew, thus Akko. It was mistakenly transcribed as Accho in the King James Bible. The guttural sound does not appear in either the early 2<sup>nd</sup> Millennium BCE Egyptian texts or the 14<sup>th</sup> century BCE el-Amarna letters written in Akkadian. Although Le Strange mentions the name given by the Crusaders, St Jean d'Acre, he does not elaborate on the fate of that name. While the name has returned to its former self, and is used both by authorities and inhabitants of the town, the West, where the Crusaders originated, insists on using the name given by the Crusaders, namely Acre!

It is at this juncture that we find evidence for different names for the city on the peninsula and the confines of the tell. We don't know if there was a name for the tell when the settlement migrated to the Peninsula and was officially named Ptolemais. We found no written sources and no coinage since the tell was basically abandoned. Until that period Akko/Akka was the settlement on the tell. The first possible name we have dates to the Crusader's period, 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century CE. This is also the first period, since the later Hellenistic period, early 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, that signs of habitation on the tell were found. There are two sources of information we found: Maps dating to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, and written sources dating to the Crusader period. The data

was gathered by M.E.G Rey and published in two volumes in 1878 and 1889. While dealing with the manuscripts of the Crusaders, he also included the name given to the tell by the locals during the time of his visit. When king Guy de Lusignan laid siege to Acre/Akko in 1189 during the Crusades, he took a position on the only hill east of the town, called the Toron. Rey found further descriptions of the area associated with the 'Toron', on the flat top part of modern Tel Akko, where the Templar Order had a building, gardens and vineyards.

This information is in accordance with data which emerged from the archaeological excavations in area H, the flat top of the tell, where in the 1983-84 seasons architectural remains dating to the 13<sup>th</sup> century CE were noted (Artzy and Beerli 2010; Artzy and Quartermaine). Only a limited excavation was carried out in the area at the time. Most of the finds from the area could be attributed to a fills bearing ceramics from various periods. Only in one part of this area, squares P-O 1, were clear architectural remains found. The stones of the building were robbed and only parts of the foundations were found. These contained ceramics from mixed periods, including from the 13<sup>th</sup> century CE. West of area H, in area G, in the 1999 excavation, carried out as an educational project under the direction of Artzy and A Killebrew, small pits were noted. These pits—much like most of the upper layers in the site—were mixed deposits of late Persian/Hellenistic remains as well as occasional 13<sup>th</sup> century CE sherds. We feel that they represent the remains of the pits prepared for the planting of vines surrounding the Templar 'Toron'. This probably followed the removal of blocks from a large building dating to the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE for secondary use in the construction of a massive building noted in the 1980s excavation of Area H in the middle of the site of Tel Akko, which is attributed to the 13<sup>th</sup> century CE, the Crusader period. The stones of this building, in turn, were robbed for the construction of the later Ottoman structures in the site of Akko/Acre (Artzy and Quartermaine 2014). Studies presently carried out by Artzy and Shirin Mahajne at the Hatter Laboratory show that, indeed, 13<sup>th</sup> century ceramics are present in the shallow 'pits' where Vines were planted.

The next evidence of the name of the tell dates quite a bit later. The site appears in a map associated with the 1799 siege of Akko by Napoleon's French army, and written on the area of the tell is: Retrenchment commenced by the

Turks (Artzy and Quartermaine 2014:16, Figure 2.9). The French troops were situated north of the road leading to Damascus, where their guns could reach and strike the fortifications. This indicates that Napoleon's army was not situated on the tell itself, despite common belief. On another map associated with the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century CE, the name of Tel Akko is given as Richard Coeur de Lion Mount (Rey 1878: 117). This name is repeated in several places, but this is not necessarily the name of the tell used by the locals. Rey, in the supplement to his first publication of Acre/Akko, published in 1889, provides further descriptive information, and using earlier sources he is able to describe the surroundings of the tell, the banks of the Na'aman River and the sandy coastlines (Rey 1889: 10-13).

In Rey's examination of the Crusader period accounts, he found that the gardens extending from the northern banks of the Na'aman river to the southern outskirts of the tell—which he calls Tell-el-Foukar—belonged to the Genoese who cultivated orchards there, similar to those in Damascus. This is the name the locals gave to the tell. It means 'tell of the sherds' (or clay). This is the name that was most likely used for a long time. When the first excavations led by Moshe Dothan took place in the early 1970's, this was the name used. There are several explanations as to why the tell was named Tell el Foukhar. The site is exceptionally rich with sherds, and the name might be associated with the site's history of occasional building material robbing, so that what was left were sherds. Yet another explanation, published by Raban (1990: 27) postulated that in the last Millennium, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Millennium BCE mud-brick and rampart remains, especially of the Middle Bronze II period, were quarried for secondary use for the production of ceramics. Indeed, until the 1980's potters were settled on the foot of the tell, although by that time the clay used was no longer from the tell itself.

Today, the locals call the site "Napoleon's Hill" or "Tel Napoleon". It seems that only lovers of archaeology refer to the tell as Tel Akko! We don't know when Richard the Lion-heart lost to Napoleon; the earliest map naming it as Napoleon's Hill is Joseph Treidel's 1925-1926 map (Artzy and Quartermaine 2014). The name associated with Napoleon is understandable,



Fig. 2. Tel Akko, Napoleon Hill (Photo: Michal Artzy).

since it was a big moment in European and Near Eastern history, and his association with the tell has gained public favour, even if the 'facts' are problematic. Today, a large metal Napoleon statue stands on the summit of the tell holding a flag (fig. 2).

Accho of the Biblical narrative has undergone spatial changes and name changes. Today, the variant of the name, as known from written sources, is still the same. Arabic and Hebrew retained the guttural 'A in the first letter of the name, which had likely been used by the Semitic locals. The settlement moved from the tell, now ca. 1 and a half km from the city, to the peninsula, where an artificial harbor was constructed towards the end of the first millennium and was officially called Ptolemais and other short-lived names, although the ancient name persisted. The Crusaders renamed their settlement which centered on the Peninsula, where the artificial harbor was re-built, St. Jean d'Acre, while the tell's area remained an agricultural periphery. Today's Akko has expanded to include the tell and neighbourhoods east and north of it. The modern name still retains the guttural sound, although most Hebrew speakers no longer use it and the Arabic speakers pronounce the name as 'Akka. Often though, the name used in the western world, such as in the UNESCO declaration of 'Akko as a World Heritage site and in maps, still appears as Acre, a vestige of the Crusaders' sojourn.

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