



Anson Frank Rainey 1930 - 2011

It was with deep sadness that we heard about the passing of Professor Anson Rainey on 19th February, 2011, after a brief battle with pancreatic cancer. Anson was associated with the Australian Institute of Archaeology in the late 1970's and in 2002 he gave the Institute's annual lecture, the Petrie Oration, entitled *The Tell el Amarna Letters: 100 Years after Flinders Petrie*; we were in the process of arranging another visit by him to Australia.

Anson was a most significant scholar in West Semitic and neighbouring languages and an authority on the historical geography of Palestine. In spite of his eminence he was always approachable, his presence at conferences added greatly to the discussion and dialogue, and his publications are a constant source of important information and ideas.

When he was in Australia in 2002 we became good friends in spite of political differences. Over a plate of hummus one day he confided that he had recently turned seventy and that he was giving his last ten years a 'real go' at research and publication. This he did and more, and apart from the invaluable results of his studies, his commitment and endeavour were an inspiration for all septuagenarians.

According to the University of Tel Aviv website, Anson Frank Rainey was born 11 January, 1930, in Dallas, Texas. After the death of his father that same year he lived with his maternal grandparents until entering Brown Military Academy, San Diego, California, where in 1946 he completed his secondary education. The military was always important to him, the television series *Band of Brothers* was released while he was in Australia and was compulsory viewing. In 1949 he completed a B.A. in Religious Education at John Brown University, Arkansas.

Anson worked as a social worker for the County Welfare Department, San Bernardino, Calif. before entering the California Baptist Theological Seminary, Covina, Calif., where he took three degrees, M.A. in Old Testament, 1953, B.D. in Biblical Theology, 1954, and M.Th. in Old Testament, 1955. In 1955-1956, he studied at the University of California, Los Angeles, and completed B.A. with Honours in Ancient History with emphasis on the Hellenistic Period.

In September, 1957, he began graduate study at Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts. He received an M.A. in 1959 and began PhD research. A Government of Israel award enabled him to study Hebrew, archaeology, Egyptian, Coptic and Phoenician at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem. After completing his doctoral dissertation on the Social Structure of Ugarit in 1962 he returned to Jerusalem to teach Historical Geography at the American Institute of Holy Land Studies (now the Jerusalem University College). He continued to teach there until recently and is responsible for training a generation of American scholars.

Anson taught in the Ancient Near Eastern Studies Department at the University of Tel Aviv where in 1967 he received tenure as a Senior Lecturer. In 1981 he became Professor of Ancient Near Eastern Cultures and Semitic Linguistics.

He was a practical archaeologist digging at Ramat Rahel (1961), Arad (1963, 64), En-gedi (1964, 65), Metzad Mazal (1965), Kh. Burgata (1966), Lachish (1966-68), Gezer (1967), Arad (1967), Kh. Rabud (1968, 69), Beer-sheba (1969-76); Tel Michal (1977-80); Tel Gerisa (1981-83, 86, 88, 95), Tel Harasim (1997-98).



Anson in 1968 instructing a group of students at Hazor.
Photo courtesy David Bivin/LifeintheHolyLand.com

Anson continued to study at the Hebrew University, in Akkadian and Sumerian with Professor Aaron Shafer and in Egyptian with Professors H. J. Polotsky and Sarah Groll. Polotsky's linguistic methodology strongly influenced him and he often referred to this time of study. A sabbatical in 1976-7 was spent at Harvard University where the groundwork was laid for a grammar of the West Semitic language as reflected in the el-Amarna letters. He also conducted a graduate seminar under the aegis of Professor William Moran, the world's leading scholar on the Amarna correspondence at that time.

The Amarna tablets became a significant field of research for Anson. He visited the Cairo museum in 1980-2 to study the tablets there and by 2007 he had worked on all known Amarna tablets after visiting, London, Oxford, New York, Boston, Chicago, Berlin and Moscow. His four-volume *Canaanite in the Amarna tablets: A linguistic analysis of the mixed dialect used by scribes from Canaan*, appeared in 1996. This was prepared during three sabbaticals spent at the University of Pennsylvania where he also taught a seminar in Northwest Semitic inscriptions. All four volumes were published by E. J. Brill Publishers in 1996 in a series entitled *Handbuch der Orientalistik*.

Meanwhile Anson completed a revision of Yohanan Aharoni's *Carta's Atlas of the Biblical Period* that appeared in English as the first part of *The Macmillan Bible Atlas* (1993) and a translation of D. Sivan's *Grammar of Ugaritic*, *Handbuch der Orientalistik*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997.

From 1984 Anson taught Historical Geography part-time at Bar Ilan University in the Department of Eretz-Israel Studies. He became an Emeritus Professor of the University of Tel Aviv in 1998 and his teaching at Tel Aviv and Ben Gurion University of the Negev drew to a close in 2001. He then had Fellowships in London, University of California, Los Angeles, Konkuk University in Seoul, Korea, University of Melbourne, Australia.

Anson continued to teach as an adjunct professor at Bar Ilan University and Orot College and at the Jerusalem University College until 2007. During this time he wrote his own historical geography text with Steven Notley, who took responsibility for the Hellenistic and Roman periods. *The Sacred Bridge: Carta's Atlas of the Biblical World*, appeared in 2006 (Jerusalem: Carta Publishers) and contains discussions of epigraphic geographical sources as well as new information derived from field research.

During his career Anson authored more than a dozen volumes, translated nearly that many more, authored in excess of two hundred scholarly articles, wrote numerous reviews, and presented more than eighty conference papers. The Tel Aviv University website has a complete list of publications (http://www.tau.ac.il/humanities/archaeology/directory/dir_anson_rainey.html).

He is survived by one son from his third marriage. He converted to Judaism in 1980 and became an Israeli citizen. Although he was completely committed to Israel and was staunchly right wing, he never seems to have been fully accepted there; the reasons for this are no doubt complex. Anson was very much his own man.

Some of the tasks delegated to him proved interesting. On one occasion he was asked to accompany the two daughters of Sir Charles Marston to Tell ed-Duweir to show them the site of the excavation that their father had funded in the 1930's. He remembered the two rotund women skidding down the side of the Tell on their backsides with much laughter and he also remembered their intense dislike of their autocratic father, although from the biography they later wrote, it is clear that they respected him.

Anson Rainey was one of the great ancient Near Eastern scholars of our time. When he gave the 2002 Petrie Oration at Deakin University in Melbourne, staff from all of Melbourne's other Universities attended, an unprecedented occurrence and a local benchmark for superstardom. He believed it was important to get it 'right', and he had a fearsome reputation with those whom he felt had been sloppy with the evidence. When we attended an Egyptology seminar in Melbourne I remember the visiting international scholar was aghast to see Anson sitting in the front row; although her subject was the Amarna period it turned out she had nothing to worry about.

Anson Rainey was accessible, his support of students was legendary and he always responded helpfully to queries. He had the scholarly confidence that only mastery of all relevant fields and comprehensive research brings, and he had no need to seek support from any particular school of thought. With Anson's passing the field of ancient Near Eastern scholarship has lost a giant; we will be the worse for the absence of his linguistic scholarship and future Near Eastern conferences will be much less enjoyable without his friendly presence and learned contribution.

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