

THE SHEPHELAH AND JERUSALEM'S WESTERN BORDER IN THE AMARNA PERIOD

By Israel Finkelstein¹

Abstract:

The article deals with several topics related to the situation in southern Canaan in the Amarna period: the number of city-states in the Shephelah; multiple skirmishes along the border between the Shephelah polities and Jerusalem, which may attest to expansion attempts of the latter; 14th century BCE destruction layers at several sites in the region; and the nature of Egyptian rule during this period.

Keywords: Amarna letters, Amarna period, Late Bronze Age, Abdi-Heba, Shuwardata, Jerusalem, Gath, Keilah, Rubutu, Gezer

Several issues related to the Shephelah in the Amarna period have recently been dealt with. First and foremost among them are the territorial disposition of the region at that time (NA'AMAN 2011; see before FINKELSTEIN 1996a; NA'AMAN 1997) and skirmishes between the highlands and Shephelah polities along the border between them in the early phases of the Iron Age, as depicted in the Hebrew Bible, compared to parallel situations described in the Amarna letters (NA'AMAN 2010; FINKELSTEIN 2013a). The petrographic study of the Amarna letters (GOREN, FINKELSTEIN and NA'AMAN 2004) and the growing archaeological evidence for the Late Bronze IIA in southern Canaan, at sites such as Beth-shemesh and Jaffa (ZIFFER, BUNIMOVITZ and LEDERMAN 2009; http://www.nelc.ucla.edu/jaffa/assets/2013_JCHP_Press_Release.pdf respectively) shed new light on this period. Being an adherent of the *longue durée* concept of territorial history, I believe that the situation in the Shephelah in the Late Bronze Age indeed holds a key to understanding the processes that took place in this region in the Iron Age (for this line of thought see, e.g., FINKELSTEIN and NA'AMAN 2005; NA'AMAN 2010). This is especially true regarding the Amarna period, which supplies detailed textual infor-

mation about city-states, settlements and political maneuvers in this area.

In what follows I wish to deal with three connected issues:

1. The number and location of the city-states of the Shephelah as depicted in the Amarna letters.
2. Tensions and skirmishes in the eastern Shephelah, along the boundary of the lowlands polity with Jerusalem, compared to similar situations in the area of Shechem further to the north. These affairs may testify to expansion attempts of Jerusalem to the west.
3. Destruction layers at sites in the south and the status of Egyptian rule in Canaan in the Amarna period.

Admittedly, some of the proposals in this article may be speculative; still, they are no more speculative than other studies on the territorial organization in Canaan during the Amarna period.

THE NUMBER OF LATE BRONZE CITY-STATES IN THE SHEPHELAH

This topic has recently been discussed in detail by NA'AMAN (2011; see already NA'AMAN 1975), who sought the minimal number of Canaanite city-states in the Shephelah according to the Amarna tablets. Na'aman listed three main (the first three below) and five conjectured city-states (Fig. 1):

1. Gazru=Gezer, with its three rulers – Milkilu, Yapaḥu and Ba^olu-danu – who sent 12 of the Amarna letters.
2. Gimtu=Gath (RAINEY 1975), with two rulers – Shuwardata and Abdi-Ashtarti (for the location of the latter see NA'AMAN 1979; GOREN, FINKELSTEIN and NA'AMAN 2004: 283–286) – who sent 11 letters.
3. Lakisha (=Lachish), with three rulers – Zimreddi, Shiṭti-Ba^olu and Yabni-Ilu – who sent six Amarna letters.

¹ Tel Aviv University

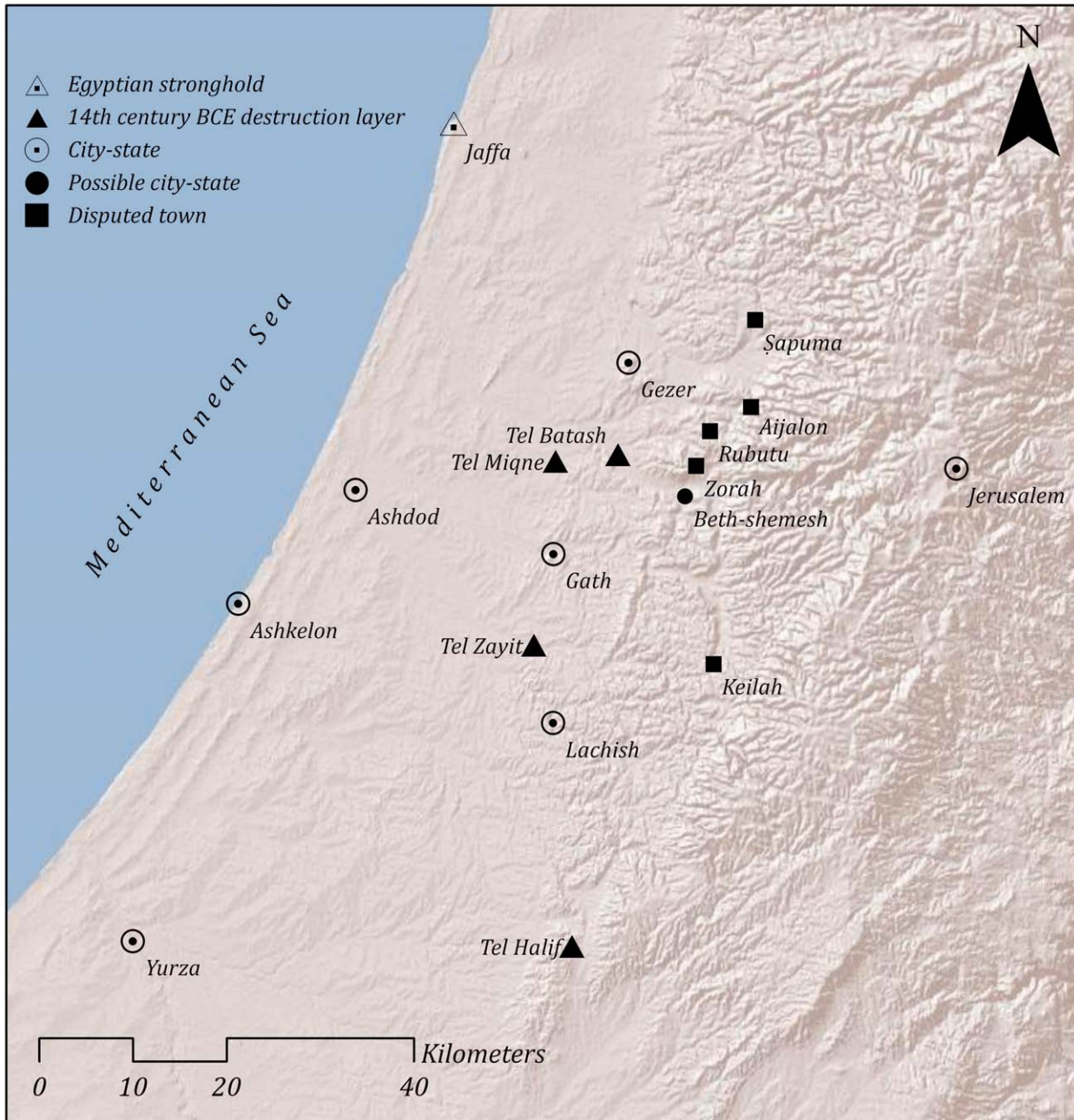


Fig. 1 Sites mentioned in the article.

4. Beth-shemesh, where NA'AMAN identifies the seat of the queen mother Belit-labi'at, the author of EA 273–274, and Yaḥzib-Hadda, who wrote EA 275–276 and probably also 277 (GOREN, FINKELSTEIN and NA'AMAN 2004: 290–291).
5. Murashti, mentioned in EA 335, where he suggests placing Shipti-Ba^olu mentioned in EA 333 and Turbazu mentioned in EA 288 and 335. Na'aman identifies this place with Tel Zayit, south of Tell es-Safi.
6. [xx]shiki of EA 335, according to Na'aman possibly the seat of Yaptiḥ-Hadda, referred to in EA 288 and 335.
7. The seat of Abdina, the sender of EA 229, which Na'aman suggests locating somewhere in the longitudinal valley that separates the highlands and the Shephelah.
8. Aḥtiruna of EA 319, whose vocabulary fits a scribe of southern Canaan. The location of this place could not be identified in the petrographic study of the Amarna letters because the tablet was probably sent from Gaza (GOREN, FINKELSTEIN and NA'AMAN 2004: 302–303).

Na'aman, then, identifies up to eight city-states in an area ca. 35 × 20 km. When one thinks about

issues of agricultural output and manpower (for the latter see BUNIMOVITZ 1994), this is unlikely, not to mention that no area in Canaan features a similar density of polity. For instance, the fertile Jezreel and Beth-shean Valleys had four-to-five polities, and the entire coastal plain south of Beirut had ten city-states. The task is therefore to separate the explicit evidence from the conjectured; in other words, to verify how confident one can be that all the above sites indeed served as hubs of Amarna petty-rulers, and to check whether Amarna rulers with no named seats can be “added” to the main hubs of city-states in the Shephelah and southern coastal plain.

Of the two letters of Belit-labi'at, one (EA 273) was checked petrographically and was found to have probably been sent from Gezer (GOREN, FINKELSTEIN and NA'AMAN 2004: 276–277). In it this queen or queen mother reports events that took place at Ayyaluna (=biblical Aijalon²) in the Aijalon Valley and Şarḥa (=biblical Zorah) on the ridge overlooking the valley of Nahal Soreq. Accordingly, she could have been located at Beth-shemesh, which would have her reporting about events to her north; but putting her at Gezer is an equally strong option (discussion in GOREN, FINKELSTEIN and NA'AMAN 2004: 277; see also RAINEY 2012: 137, who sees her as the widow of Milkilu). In fact, the link made by Belit-labi'at between the sons of Milkilu and the towns of Aijalon and Zorah hints that they belonged to Gezer.

Based on the petrographic investigation, the three letters of Yahzib-Hadda could have been sent from Beth-shemesh, but they could also have been dispatched from a town on the eastern flank of the Gath territory (because of the petrographic similarity to EA 278 of Shuwardata – GOREN, FINKELSTEIN and NA'AMAN 2004: 290–291). In fact, one may wonder if Yahzib-Hadda was not another ruler at Gath; his letters do not disclose his time during the Amarna correspondence, and NA'AMAN's notion (2011: 283) that there is no slot for a third ruler there (in addition to Shuwardata and Abdi-Ashirta) is inconclusive. This is so because: 1) according to him EA 366 is the only Shuwardata letter still within the time of Labayu (e.g., NA'AMAN 1975: 120, 122, 128), while Abdi-Ashtarti ruled after Shuwardata; so another ruler is possible in the early days of the correspondence; 2) the

similarity between EA 278, an early letter of Shuwardata and EA 275–276 of Yahzib-Hadda (KNUDTZON 1915: 1329; CAMPBELL 1964: 112–113; NA'AMAN 1975: 131), puts the latter early in the correspondence; 3) the three letters of Yahzib-Hadda may have been dispatched at one time from a single place during a specific event (GOREN, FINKELSTEIN and NA'AMAN 2004: 291), which means that he could have ruled for a very short period of time. Note in this connection the instability in the other city-states of the Shephelah – three mayors at Gezer and in Lachish during the period of the archive.

The letters of the three Lachish rulers also leave a slot for another mayor in the early days of the correspondence, before the death of Labayu (see NA'AMAN 1975: 133). A “space” in the early days of the correspondence can also be found in the cases of Yurza and possibly Ashkelon (NA'AMAN 1975: 228), as well as in Ashdod (for the latter being a seat of a Canaanite ruler see GOREN, FINKELSTEIN and NA'AMAN 2004: 292–294).

The text of EA 335 does not say that Murashti (biblical Moresheth-gath, that is, in the Iron Age a place located in proximity to Gath) and [xx]shiki were seats of Canaanite rulers. They could have been towns in the territories of Lachish or Gath, or on their western border with city-states of the coastal plain (similar to Aijalon and Zorah in the territory of Gezer in EA 273). Note NA'AMAN's proposal (2011) to identify Murashtu with Tel Zayit, situated ca. 8 km south of Tell es-Safi and 7 km north of Lachish. The possibility that [xx]shiki is mentioned (as Nentishi) in a hieratic inscription on a Lachish bowl (SWEENEY 2004; NA'AMAN 2011: notes 4, 9), strengthens the prospect that it was a town in this city's territory.

Tubarzu and Yaptiḥ-Hadda are mentioned together with Zimreddi of Lachish. They may have been rulers of city-states on the southern coastal plain, such as Yurza and Ashkelon. Note that only one ruler of Yurza (Pu-Ba^clu in EA 314–316) is mentioned in the archive – probably in its later days. Two rulers of Ashkelon are known – Yidia and Shubandu (the latter put in Ashkelon according to the petrographic study of his letters – GOREN, FINKELSTEIN and NA'AMAN 2004: 294–299).

Shipti-Ba^clu of EA 333 is not identified by Na'aman with the individual of the same name who ruled at Lachish, probably because he is men-

² The first mention in the article of a place which is identifiable with a biblical toponym is in its Amarna form, with

the biblical name in parenthesis. Following references are usually only to the biblical name.

tioned in the tablet together with Zimreddi of Lachish. But could they have been father and son?

Petrographically, the letter of Abdina (EA 229) is similar to EA 64, which was probably sent by Abdi-Ashtarti of Gath from somewhere in the eastern flank of the latter's territory (GOREN, FINKELSTEIN and NA'AMAN 2004: 284–286). Abdina could indeed have ruled somewhere in the eastern Shephelah, or, could have been another short-time ruler at Gath.

Finally, Aḥtiruna is associated with the south because of the vocabulary of the letter (EA 319). The petrographic investigation shows that it was probably sent from Gaza (ibid.: 302–303). It could have been a city in the Shephelah (and then some of the above-mentioned rulers, e. g., Abdina, could also have ruled from there). Na'aman's proposal to equate the name with the biblical name Ataroth (GOREN, FINKELSTEIN and NA'AMAN 2004: 302), would point to the highlands (rather than the Shephelah) – the location of all biblical sites carrying this name on both sides of the Jordan. Elsewhere I have recently raised the possibility – remote as it may sound – that this place was located in Transjordan, in the vicinity of Amman (FINKELSTEIN forthcoming).

My proposals above may be somewhat probable, or not very probable at all; what I have tried to show here is that the real minimal number of city-states in the Shephelah is three – Gezer, Gath and Lachish. Beth-shemesh is indeed a possibility – also because of the results of excavations there, which seem to underline its importance in the Amarna period – as is a (still unidentified) place in the southeastern Shephelah, e. g., Tel Eton (for this site having been a significant Late Bronze settlement see FAUST and KATZ 2012: 178). These notions can change the number of city-states in the Shephelah from three to five; but given the data at hand even these cases cannot be proven, and this is not to mention the other alternatives listed above.

SKIRMISHES ON THE BORDER BETWEEN THE HIGHLANDS AND THE SHEPHELAH

Six disputed/fought-over towns

NA'AMAN (1979) laid the foundation for understanding the turmoil in the south in the Amarna period. Several Amarna letters mention skirmishes over towns located on the border between the territories of Jerusalem and city-states in the Shephelah. Table 1 summarizes this information (see Fig. 1).

Six towns are mentioned in these letters. It is essential to first fix their location and territorial affiliation.

Qeltu, biblical Keilah, is identified with Khirbet Qila, G.R. 150 113. The mound is located in the longitudinal valley of the eastern Shephelah, below the sharp drop of the Hebron Highlands to the west. The town – disputed between Shuwardata's Gath and Abdi-Heba's Jerusalem – probably changed hands more than once during the time of the correspondence. From its geographical position – in the Shephelah and far from Jerusalem – there can be little doubt that it originally belonged to Gath. Perhaps the fact that it was slightly isolated tempted Abdi-Heba to try to capture it (for comparison between the events in the Amarna period and the biblical narrative of David and his men at Keilah see NA'AMAN 2010).

Rubutu was a town near the border of Gezer and Jerusalem (MAZAR 1957: 60–63; AHARONI 1969; KALLAI and TADMOR 1969: 143–144; KITCHEN 1973: 434–435; AHITUV 1984: 165–167). The most common identification is with Kh. Hamideh (Bir el-Hilu) near Latrun (AHARONI 1969). NA'AMAN (2000a) suggested identifying it with the Rubutu mentioned in Ta'anach tablet TT 1:26, *Rbt* of the Thutmose III and Sheshonq I lists, and the city of Aruboth – the center of the Solomonic third district (1 Kgs 4: 10). Accordingly he sought Rubutu in the Dothan Valley. Na'aman's suggestion cannot be accepted for two reasons: 1) the two Amarna tablets clearly show that Rubutu was disputed between Gezer and Jerusalem; 2) this is also the location of *Rbt* mentioned by Thutmose III and Sheshonq I (in the order Gezer→Rubutu→Aijalon, e. g., MAZAR 1957: 60; AHARONI 1979: 325; recently FINKELSTEIN and FANTALKIN 2012). Originally this place must have been in the territory of Gezer. It was probably taken over by Abdi-Heba, and then restored to Gezer with the help of Tagi and Shuwardata. Originally Shuwardata was an ally of Jerusalem (EA 366); his involvement in the Rubutu affair hints that it took place close to the time of the Keilah dispute.

Bit-NIN.URTA. Locating this place depends on the identification of the West Semitic deity which is veiled by the Mesopotamian name Ninurta (e. g., NA'AMAN 1990: 252–254; RAINEY 2012), and on its association in EA 290 with Keilah. Abdi-Heba complains that Bit-NIN.URTA, his town, was taken over by men of Keilah, possibly a group of Apiru based there. This could have been in retaliation against Abdi-Heba's attack on Keilah. Several

Table 1: Amarna letters specifically referring to clashes over towns located on the border between the highlands and the Shephelah.

EA no.	Sent by (ruler and city)	Town in question	Main information in the text
279	Shuwardata, Gath	Qeltu (=biblical Keilah)	Shuwardata goes against the traitors in Keilah
280	Shuwardata, Gath	Keilah	The king of Egypt permitted Shuwardata to wage war against Keilah and he did. The town was restored to him. Abdi-Heba wrote to the men of Keilah to bribe them. Labayu is dead; Abdi-Heba, accused of being the new Labayu, took Shuwardata's town
287	Abdi-Heba, Urusalim (=Jerusalem)	Keilah Aijalon	Milkilu and Tagi (?) brought troops to Keilah against Abdi-Heba Abdi-Heba sent gifts with a caravan, but it was stopped near Aijalon.
289	Abdi-Heba, Jerusalem	Rubutu Keilah	Milkilu and Tagi took Rubutu Milkilu, Tagi and the sons of Labayu helped Keilah in order to isolate Jerusalem
290	Abdi-Heba	Rubutu Bit-NIN.URTA	Milkilu and Shuwardata brought troops from Gezer, Gath and Keilah and took Rubutu. Ginti (probably the capital of Tagi) was also involved on their side Bit-NIN.URTA, a town of Jerusalem, went over to the side of the men of Keilah
273	Belit-labi'at, Beth-shemesh or Gezer	Aijalon and Zorah	The Apiru wrote to Aijalon and Zorah and the two sons of Milkilu barely escaped being killed
274	Belit-labi'at, Beth-shemesh or Gezer	Şapuma	Şapuma is taken

locations have been suggested for Bit-NIN.URTA: Beth-horon (KALLAI and TADMOR 1969; RAINEY 2012: 136), Beth-zur (SINGER 1993: 136) and an unidentified Beit 'Anat (NA'AMAN 1990: 252–254; see detailed review of different proposals in KALLAI and TADMOR 1969: 139). From the archaeological point of view, Beth-horon and Beth-zur are preferable candidates, since they revealed Late Bronze finds (Beit 'Ur el-Tahta and Kh. et-Tubeiqah respectively – FINKELSTEIN 1988: 48, 177). Identification with Beth-zur would fit better the association with Keilah, as Kh. et-Tubeiqah is only eight km to the east-southeast of Kh. Qila. But in the micro-topography of the region, Beth-zur in the highlands is a world apart from Keilah in the lowlands. It should therefore be better to seek a place in the Shephelah close to Keilah. In this regard one is reminded of two places names hinting at a cult place mentioned in Joshua 15 in the Lachish-Eglon-Makkedah district of the Juda-

hite Shephelah, that is, possibly close to Keilah, to its south: Beth-dagon (v. 41) and Migdal-gad (v. 37); yet, apart from the fact that they represent a period many centuries later than the Amarna correspondence, in both cases the identification of the West Semitic deity with the Mesopotamian Ninurta is improbable.³ Still, any of the Late Bronze sites in the vicinity (FINKELSTEIN 1996b) could have had a temple called after a deity which can be identified with Ninurta.

Ayyaluna and Sarha. These are biblical Aijalon, identified with Yalo in the east of the Aijalon Valley, G.R. 151 138, and biblical Zorah, identified at Şar'ah, on the ridge overlooking the Soreq Valley from the north, G.R. 148 131. The queen mother Belit-labi'at writes that the Apiru wrote to these towns and that the two sons of Milkilu were almost killed as a result. Both places were located on the eastern flank of the territory of Gezer (NA'AMAN 1992). In the case that the Apiru

³ Personal communication from Ran Zadok.

referred to by Belit-lebi'at is Abdi-Heba, this may indicate another attempt of westward expansion by Jerusalem.

Şapuma. ZADOK (1986: 180) suggested that Şapuma may be the same as Sappho of JOSEPHUS (*Antiquities* 17: 10: 9–290; *Wars* 2: 5: 1–70), identified at the village of Şaffa (G.R. 155 146) in the foothills near Late Bronze Gezer's eastern border. For lack of Late Bronze remains there, Zadok proposed to seek Şapuma at a nearby site. The relatively large multi-period mound of el-Burj (Horvat Tittora), located only three km west of Şaffa, could fit this identification (NA'AMAN 2011: 292; for Late Bronze finds there see GOPHNA and PORAT 1972: 235, though later surveys of SHAVIT (1992: 90) and HIZMI (1993: 109) failed to retrieve similar finds). In EA 274 Belit-labi'at reports that the town of Şapuma has been taken by the Apiru. Being in the foothills, it must have been a town in the territory of Gezer. In this case too it is possible that the attack came from Jerusalem.

Jerusalem's expansion attempts?

Plotting the contested towns on a map (Fig. 1) makes it clear that at least five of them – and possibly all six – are located in the eastern Shephelah, along the eastern flank of the territories of Gezer and Gath, bordering on the territory of Jerusalem in the highlands. In fact, the five towns make a “straight line” from Şapuma in the north to Keilah in the south. As explained above, Bit-NIN.URTA could have been located in a similar geographic setting south of Keilah.

Jerusalem – either explicitly or under the disparaging title “Apiru” – is related to the affairs in all these places. Based on this and on comparison to the Shechem and Amurru Amarna dossiers (FINKELSTEIN and NA'AMAN 2005; GOREN, FINKELSTEIN and NA'AMAN 2003 respectively, and see below), it should only be logical to assume that we witness attempts by Abdi-Heba to expand his territory to the lowlands in the west and subjugate towns located on the eastern flanks of Gezer and Gath (possibly also Lachish in the case of Bit-NIN.URTA). The rulers of Gezer and Gath, probably backed by Egypt (NA'AMAN 2000b on the Abdi-

Heba's conflict with the Egyptian authorities) and assisted by Tagi of Ginti-kirmil (Jatt in the Sharon Plain – GOREN, FINKELSTEIN and NA'AMAN 2004: 256–259) and at a certain point probably also by the sons of Labyau of Shechem (EA 289), fought back.⁴ The construction of “a house”, possibly a fort, in the service of Egypt in a place named Manḥatu in the land of Gezer (EA 292) may also be related to the unrest in the eastern territory of this city-state.⁵

One can speculate that the assassination of three southern rulers – Zimreddi, Yaptih-Hadda and Turbazu – described in EA 288 (from the viewpoint of Jerusalem) and EA 335 (from the viewpoint of Gath) is connected to the struggle in the eastern Shephelah. Zimreddi was the ruler of Lachish – probably the southernmost city-state of the Shephelah, which bordered on the southwestern flank of the Jerusalem territory. As I have suggested above, Yaptih-Hadda and Turbazu could have ruled in two cities on the southern coastal plain, such as Yurza and Ashdod.

I would also speculate that the three rulers may have cooperated with Jerusalem in putting pressure on southern and western towns in the territory of Gath. This situation may be depicted in EA 281 and 283, in which Shuwardata complains that his towns are hostile to him and the war against him is severe (see also EA 271, in which Milkilu reports on the war against him and Shuwardata; on all this, including other references in the letters, see NA'AMAN 1979). In EA 335 Abdi-Ashtarti of Gath complains that Lachish is hostile and that Murashti has been seized. This town may be identified somewhere south of Tell es-Safi/Gath, for instance at Tel Zayit (NA'AMAN 2011: 285), about mid-way between Gath and Lachish. The other place mentioned with Lachish is restored “Jerusalem” by MORAN (1992: 358) and [URU^Ux-x]-shi-ki by NA'AMAN (2011: 284), who proposed to equate it with a town named Nentisha, referred to in an inscription on a bowl from Lachish (SWEENEY 2004).⁶ This may also hint at a town on the border of Lachish and Gath. The town of Silu, where the three kings were killed (EA 288: 42, 46), could have been located in a similar geographic setting.⁷

⁴ This period of unrest characterizes an advanced stage in the period of the Amarna correspondence; earlier, Shuwardata was an ally of Jerusalem (EA 366).

⁵ The stationing of an Egyptian garrison in Jerusalem may also have been connected to these affairs.

⁶ Another town which may be connected to these events is Tianna of EA 284, 298 and 306, identified by Na'aman with Ashdod and by myself with a town on the border between Gezer and Ashdod (see discussion in GOREN, FINKELSTEIN and NA'AMAN 2004: 292). The reading Tianna was dismissed by RAINEY (2003).

All this may hint at the existence of two coalitions in the south. One, led by Jerusalem, included Lachish⁸ and two additional city-states on the coast, possibly Yurza and Ashdod,⁹ and the other, backed by Egypt, consisted of Gath, Gezer and seemingly Ashkelon (see EA 287). The three rulers may have been assassinated by agents of the anti-Jerusalem coalition in order to relieve the pressure on Gath.

Jerusalem, Shechem and attempts at state-formation

The fact that at a certain point Shechem may have helped the city-states of the Shephelah against Jerusalem seems to hint at a struggle in the highlands too. But this should not veil the similarities in the policies of the two polities and the fact that the core of unrest in southern Canaan was in the central highlands. Both Jerusalem and Shechem attempted to expand to the lowlands, possibly with the same goals in mind. And they did so by taking their own aggressive steps, and seemingly also by establishing broad anti-Egypt coalitions.

This is certainly true for Shechem. Its maneuvers were dealt with in detail elsewhere (FINKELSTEIN and NA'AMAN 2005), hence a short summary will suffice. The Shechem coalition included Gezer, Ginti-kirmil, the city state which was located at Tel Yokneam, Shimon, Anaharath and Pihilu (=Pehel), while the Egypt-supported anti-Shechem coalition included Megiddo, Rehob, Achshaph, Acco and possibly Hazor. Shechem's goals seem to have been to establish access to the Mediterranean trade, command over important trade routes, and domination over the fertile lands of the Jezreel-

Beth-shean Valleys. Shechem apparently managed to extend its rule to the southern part of the Jezreel Valley (EA 250) and its coalition attempted to encircle the Jezreel Valley entities – the Egypt-supported city-states of Megiddo and Rehob and the Egyptian center of Beth-shean. At the peak of its maneuvers, the Shechem coalition dominated large and important parts of Canaan, from the Bashan in the northeast through the northern sector of the central highlands to the Sharon and the coastal plain south of the Yarkon River in the southwest. It controlled the port of Dor (also Acco), important sections of the international road leading from Egypt to Syria and Mesopotamia along the coastal plain and the Bashan, as well as a section of the “King's Highway” in Transjordan.

The steps taken by Abdi-Heba, as described above, seem to have been somewhat smaller in scope and ambition, and appear to have started somewhat later, possibly as a result of what looked at the time like a success by Shechem and a weak reaction on the part of Egypt. As in the case of Shechem, Jerusalem's maneuvers included two components: subjugation of towns in the lowlands near its territory and establishing a coalition with lowlands city-states. Jerusalem may have aimed at forming a hold in harbors along the coast and some sort of domination on the international road on the southern coastal plain.¹⁰ No wonder that in both cases the anti-central highlands coalition was supported by the Egyptian authorities – a minimal step taken in order to maintain control in the region.¹¹

What we see here are early attempts to establish territorial formations ruled from the central highlands.¹² With no historical documentation

⁷ For its location in the southern lowlands of Canaan, possibly near Lachish, rather than on the eastern border of the Nile Delta see NA'AMAN 1979.

⁸ Assuming that EA 287 does not name Lachish (NA'AMAN 1975: 40, n. 38).

⁹ Especially if the latter was involved with the Muḥḥazu affair, mentioned in EA 298 – see note 10 below.

¹⁰ The Muḥḥazu incident, mentioned in EA 298, may be part of this. Yapaḥu, the ruler of Gezer, mentions how his brother became his enemy, entered Muḥḥazu and “pledged himself to the Apiru”. I have already noted that in the case of several complaint letters from southern Canaan, the disparaging title Apiru may be understood as referring to Jerusalem. Muḥḥazu should probably be identified with the port-site of Yavne Yam in the territory of Gezer, south of Jaffa (GOREN, FINKELSTEIN and NA'AMAN 2004: 270).

¹¹ The expansion of Abdi-Ashirta and Aziru of Amurru from their original stronghold in Mount Lebanon to the western

foothills and then to the coastal plain, and the establishment of a large territorial polity which stretched over part of the Orontes Valley too, was also treated in detail elsewhere (GOREN, FINKELSTEIN and NA'AMAN 2003). Though this affair took place in a different geopolitical scene – on the northern border of Egyptian rule in Canaan – and on a larger scale, it features several striking similarities to the affairs in southern Canaan.

¹² This phenomenon is known from different periods in the history of the Levant. To mention only the sedentary parts of the region, and to start with recent centuries, it resembles the 18th century CE expansion of Dahr el-Umar in the Lower Galilee and the ca. 1600 CE politics of Fakhr ed-Din in the Chouf Mountains of Lebanon. The Hellenistic period provides at least two examples: The Ituraean kingdom that emerged in Mount Lebanon (see, e.g., MARFOE 1979: 23–25) and the Hasmonean kingdom that began its expansion from a modest settlement in Jerusalem.

there is no way to know if these were the first such attempts, and whether they were the only such episodes in the Late Bronze and early Iron Ages. It is clear though that full success in such maneuvers was difficult as long as Egypt ruled Canaan, and hence came only two centuries after New Kingdom's Egypt withdrew from the region, with the emergence of Israel and Judah. Similarities between the case of Shechem of the Amarna period and the rise of the Northern Kingdom include expansion attempts to the coast in the west and the Jezreel Valley in the north (FINKELSTEIN and NA'AMAN 2005; somewhat different version in FINKELSTEIN 2013b). Parallels between the policies of Jerusalem of the 14th century BCE and the emergence of Judah are featured mainly in the expansion attempts to the Shephelah in the west (for Judah see, e.g., FANTALKIN and FINKELSTEIN 2006; FANTALKIN 2008; SERGI 2013; a somewhat different view in NA'AMAN 2013).

EGYPTIAN RULE IN CANAAN IN THE AMARNA PERIOD

The Amarna archive covers a relatively short period of about 25 years. The question arises, if the situation of unrest, expansion of highlands polities and deterioration of Egyptian rule depicted in the letters was specific to this period or endemic to the Egyptian province of Canaan in the Late Bronze Age. In this case, too, with no similar records for other phases of the period, the textual material can hardly provide an answer.

Archaeology may shed light on this issue. Recent excavations have revealed evidence for 14th century BCE destruction layers at a surprisingly large number of sites, especially in the area in the southern lowlands as discussed in this article (Fig. 1):

Beth-shemesh. The city of Level 9, which dates to the Late Bronze IIA in the 14th century BCE, came to an end in a dramatic destruction by fire, characterized by hundreds of collapsed mudbricks, which were baked in heavy conflagration (ZIFFER, BUNIMOVITZ and LEDERMAN 2009; BUNIMOVITZ, LEDERMAN and HATZAKI 2013: 3).

Tel Zayit. The earliest of the Late Bronze II layer at the site, which apparently dates to the Late Bronze IIA, features a large public building that was destroyed by fire. The accumulation of the collapsed remains reaches ca. two meters (TAPPY 2008).

Tel Batash. Stratum VII at this site, which features a large, well-planned, multi-storied building,

was destroyed by a fierce conflagration which left destruction debris up to two meters high. The assemblage in this layer dates to the 14th century BCE (MAZAR 1997: 58–71; PANITZ-COHEN 2006: 130–132).

Tel Miqne/Ekron. The final phase of Stratum IX in the *sondage*, which apparently dates to the 14th century, ended in fire (DOTHAN and GITIN 1993: 1052).

Tel Halif. The early phase of Stratum IX, which dates to the Late Bronze IIA, ended in what is described as a “general destruction” (SEGER 1993: 556).

An interesting clue for the situation in Canaan in the Late Bronze IIA comes from the Egyptian center of Beth-shean, which may have suffered destruction during the Amarna period. The evidence comes from Stratum R-1a (Level IX of the University of Pennsylvania excavations) of the Late Bronze IIA in the 14th century BCE (MULLINS and MAZAR 2007: 196). The situation in other Egyptian strongholds – for instance in Jaffa where the Egyptian fort is now being excavated (preliminary report in http://www.nelc.ucla.edu/jaffa/assets/2013_JCHP_Press_Release.pdf) – is not clear yet. But the Beth-shean results seem to show that even an Egyptian center of power was not immune in this period of unrest; in other words, there were forces in Canaan that did not hesitate to act against the heartland of Egyptian rule.

Whether all the destructions in southern Canaan were caused by local strife – or whether some of them were inflicted by Egyptian punitive campaigns – is not known. It is noteworthy that no similar wave of destructions has thus far been revealed until the late 13th century or even later, in the mid-to-late 12th century BCE – the end phase of Egyptian rule in Canaan. From this one may obtain a glimpse into the gravity of the situation in the 14th century BCE. On the other hand this may hint that the Egyptian military campaign referred to in EA 367 and 370 and other letters succeeded to pacify the country.

Conclusion

The Amarna letters provide detailed information on the territorio-political situation in southern Canaan in the 14th century BCE. Three dominant city-states – Gezer, Gath and Lachish – ruled in the Shephelah. To these one may add Beth-shemesh and an additional, yet unknown seat of one or more local ruler/s. The letters seem to dis-

close a progressive attempt by Jerusalem to expand to the west by conquering towns on the eastern flank of the Shephelah polities. Comparison to the case of Shechem hints that in order to advance its territorial (and probably economic) goals, Jerusalem may have tried to establish an anti-Egypt coalition with some lowlands city-states. All this, and a series of destruction layers at 14th century BCE sites, including an Egyptian fort, demonstrate the gravity of the situation in Canaan from the viewpoint of the Egyptian administration.

The Jerusalem and Shechem portfolios in the Amarna archive draw a picture of early attempts by the highlands polities to establish territorial kingdoms which include areas in the lowlands. They provide an enlightening comparison for the first steps in the emergence of Judah and Israel several centuries later.

Acknowledgement

This article was prepared with the support of the Chaim Katzman Archaeology Fund, Tel Aviv University.

Bibliography

- AHARONI, Y.
1969 Rubute and Ginti-kirmil, *VT* 19, 141–144.
1979 *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography*, Philadelphia.
- BUNIMOVITZ, S.
1994 The Problem of Human Resources in Late Bronze Age Palestine and its Socioeconomic Implications, *UF* 26, 1–20.
- BUNIMOVITZ, S., LEDERMAN, Z., and HATZAKI, E.
2013 Knossian Gifts? Two Late Minoan IIA Cups from Tel Beth-shemesh, Israel, *The Annual of the British School at Athens*, 1–16.
- CAMPBELL, E.F.
1964 *The Chronology of the Amarna Letters*, Baltimore.
- DOZHAN, T., and GITIN, S.
1993 Miqne, Tel (Ekron), *NEAEHL* 3, 1051–1059.
- FANTALKIN, A.
2008 The Appearance of Rock-Cut Bench Tombs in Iron Age Judah as a Reflection of State Formation, 17–44 in A. FANTALKIN and A. YASSUR-LANDAU (eds.), *Bene Israel: Studies in the Archaeology of Israel and the Levant during the Bronze and Iron Ages in Honour of Israel Finkelstein* (Culture and History of the Ancient Near East Series 31), Leiden.
- FANTALKIN, A., and FINKELSTEIN, I.
2006 The Sheshonq I Campaign and the 8th-Century BCE Earthquake – More on the Archaeology and History of the South in the Iron I–IIA, *Tel Aviv* 33, 18–42.
- FAUST, A., and KATZ, H.
2012 Survey, Shovel Tests and Excavations at Tel 'Eton: On Methodology and Site History, *Tel Aviv* 39, 158–185.
- FINKELSTEIN, I.
1988 *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement*, Jerusalem.
1996a The Territorio-Political System of Canaan in the Late Bronze Age, *UF* 28, 221–255.
1996b The Philistine Countryside, *IEJ* 46, 225–242.
2013a Geographical and Historical Realities behind the Earliest Layer in the David Story, *SJOT* 27, 131–150.
2013b *The Forgotten Kingdom: The Archaeology and History of Northern Israel*, Atlanta.
Forthcoming Settlement Patterns and Territorial Polity in the Transjordanian Highlands in the Late Bronze Age, *UF*.
- FINKELSTEIN, I., and FANTALKIN, A.
2012 Khirbet Qeiyafa: An Unsensational Archaeological and Historical Interpretation, *Tel Aviv* 39, 38–63.
- FINKELSTEIN, I., and NA'AMAN, N.
2005 Shechem of the Amarna Period and the Rise of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, *IEJ* 55, 172–193.
- GOPHNA, R., and PORATH, Y.
1972 The Land of Ephraim and Manasseh, 196–241 in M. KOCHAVI (ed.), *Judaea, Samaria and the Golan Archaeological Survey 1967–1968*. Jerusalem (Hebrew).
- GOREN, Y., FINKELSTEIN, I., and NA'AMAN, N.
2003 The Expansion of the Kingdom of Amurru according to the Petrographic Investigation of the Amarna Tablets, *BASOR* 329, 2–11.
- 2004 *Inscribed in Clay: Provenance Study of the Amarna Letters and other Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Monograph Series of the Institute of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University 23). Tel Aviv.
- HIZMI, H.
1993 Southern Part of the Map of Beit Sira, 97–131 in I. FINKELSTEIN and Y. MAGEN (eds.), *Archaeological Survey of the Hill Country of Benjamin*. Jerusalem (Hebrew with English summary for each site).

- KALLAI, Z., and TADMOR, H.
1969 Bit Ninurta = Beth Horon – On the History of the Kingdom of Jerusalem in the Amarna Period, *Eretz-Israel* 9, 138–147 (Hebrew).
- KNUDTZON, J.A.
1915 *Die el-Amarna Tafeln*, Leipzig.
- MARFOE, L.
1979 The Integrative Transformation: Patterns of Sociopolitical Organization in Southern Syria, *BASOR* 234, 1–42.
- MAZAR, A.
1997 *Timnah (Tel Batash) I: Stratigraphy and Architecture, Text* (Qedem 37), Jerusalem.
- MAZAR, B.
1957 The Campaign of Pharaoh Shishak to Palestine, *SVT* 4, 57–66.
- MORAN, W.L.
1992 *The Amarna Letters*, Baltimore.
- MULLINS, R.A., and MAZAR, A.
2007 Area R: The Stratigraphy and Architecture of the Middle and Late Bronze Ages: Strata R-5—R-1, 39–241 in A. MAZAR, and R.A. MULLINS (eds.), *Excavations at Tel Beth-Shean 1989–1996, Volume II: The Middle and Late Bronze Age Strata in Area R*, Jerusalem.
- NA'AMAN, N.
1975 *The Political Disposition and Historical Development of Eretz-Israel According to the Amarna Letters*, Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Tel Aviv University (Hebrew with English abstract).
1979 The Origin and Historical Background of Several Amarna Letters, *UF* 11, 673–684.
1990 On Gods and Scribal Traditions in the Amarna Letters, *UF* 22, 247–255.
1992 Canaanite Jerusalem and its Central Hill Country Neighbors in the Second Millennium BCE, *UF* 24, 257–291.
1997 The Network of Canaanite Kingdoms and the City of Ashdod, *UF* 29, 599–626.
2000a Rubutu/Aruboth, *UF* 32, 373–383.
2000b The Egyptian Canaanite Correspondence, 125–138 in R. COHEN and R. WESTBROOK (eds.), *Amarna Diplomacy: The Beginning of International Relations*. Baltimore.
2010 David's Sojourn in Keilah in Light of the Amarna Letters, *VT* 60, 87–97.
2011 The Shephelah according to the Amarna Letters, 281–300 in I. FINKELSTEIN and N. NA'AMAN (eds.), *The Fire Signals of Lachish: Studies in the Archaeology and History of Israel in the Late Bronze Age, Iron Age, and Persian Period in Honor of David Ussishkin*, Winona Lake.
- 2013 The Kingdom of Judah in the 9th Century BCE: Text Analysis versus Archaeological Research. *Tel Aviv*, 247–276.
- PANITZ-COHEN, N.
2006 The Pottery of Strata XII–V, 9–150 in N. PANITZ-COHEN and A. MAZAR (eds.), *Timnah (Tel Batash) III: The Finds from the Second Millennium BCE* (Qedem 45), Jerusalem.
- RAINEY, A.F.
1975 The Identification of Philistine Gath – A Problem in Source Analysis for Historical Geography, *EI* 12, 63*–76*.
2003 Some Amarna Collations, *EI* 27, 192*–202*.
2012 Possible Involvement of Tell es-Safi (Tel Zafit) in the Amarna Correspondence, 133–140 in A.M. MAEIR (ed.), *Tell es-Safi/Gath I: The 1996–2005 Seasons*, Wiesbaden.
- SEGER, J.D.
1993 Halif, Tel, *NEAEHL* 2, 553–559.
- SERGI, O.
2013 Judah's Expansion in Historical Context, *Tel Aviv*, 226–246.
- SHAVIT, A.
1992 *The Ayalon Valley and its Vicinity during the Bronze and Iron Ages*, Unpublished MA thesis, Tel Aviv University (Hebrew, with English abstract).
- SINGER, I.
1993 The Political Organization of Philistia in Iron Age I, 132–141 in A. BIRAN and J. AVIRAM (eds.), *Biblical Archaeology Today 1990, Pre-Congress Symposium Supplement, Proceedings of the Second International Congress on Biblical Archaeology, Jerusalem 1990*, Jerusalem.
- SWEENEY, D.
2004 The Hieratic Inscriptions, 1601–1617 in D. USSISHKIN, *The Renewed Archaeological Excavations at Lachish (1973–1994)* (Monograph Series of the Institute of Archaeology Tel Aviv University 22), Tel Aviv.
- TAPPY, R.E.
2008 Zayit, Tel, *NEAEHL* 5, 2082–2083.
- ZADOK, R.
1986 Bücherbesprechungen: Eph'al, Israel ed.: The History of Eretz Israel, I. Introductions. The Early Period. Jerusalem: Keter and Yad Ben-Zvi, 1982, *ZDPV* 102, 179–180.
- ZIFFER, I., BUNIMOVITZ, S., and LEDERMAN, Z.
2009 Divine or Human? An Intriguing Late Bronze Age Plaque Figurine from Tel Beth-Shemesh, *Egypt and the Levant* 19, 333–341.